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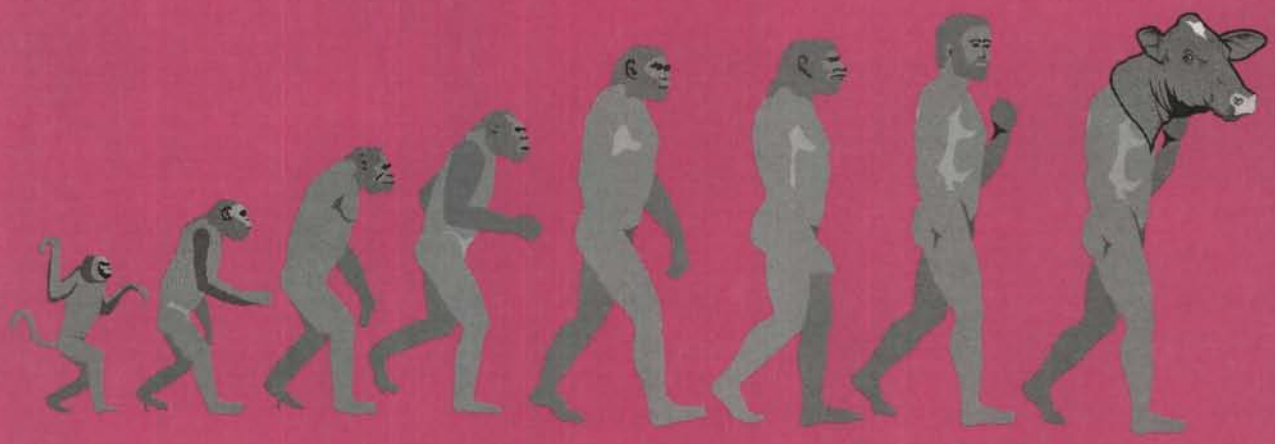

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Thomas Shannon on embryo hybrids

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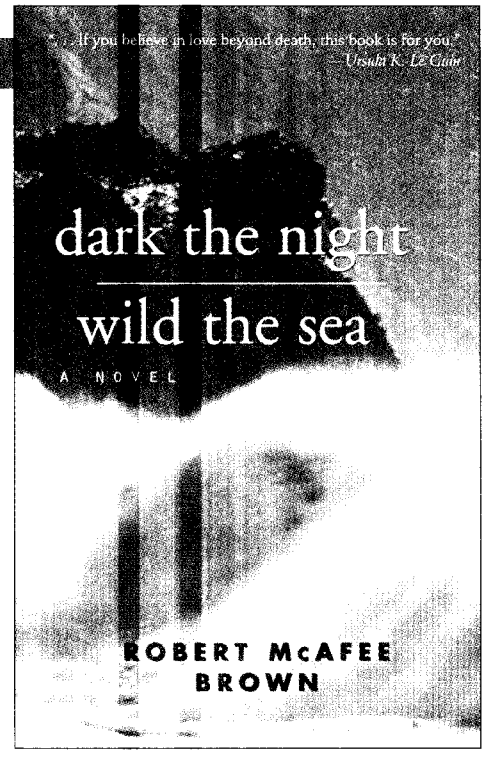

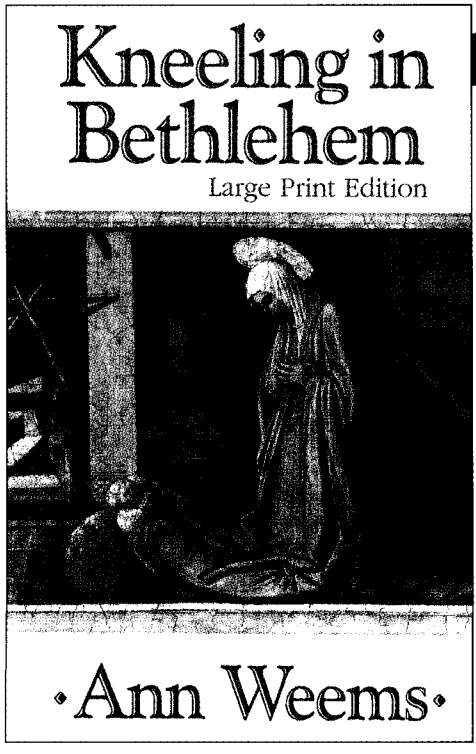

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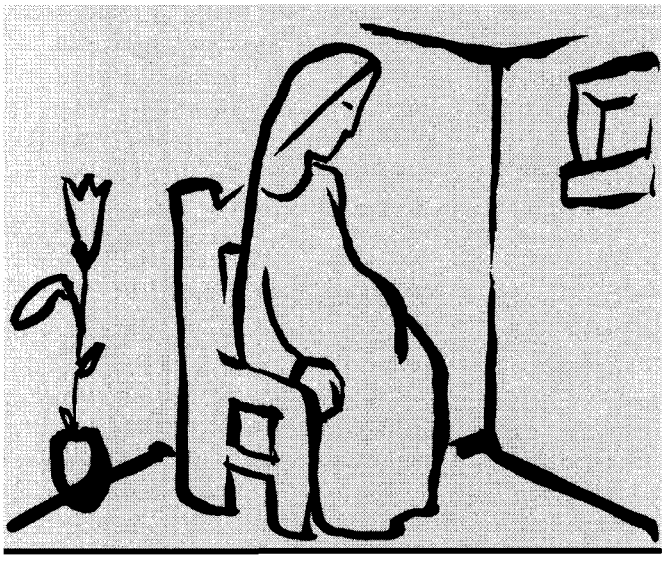

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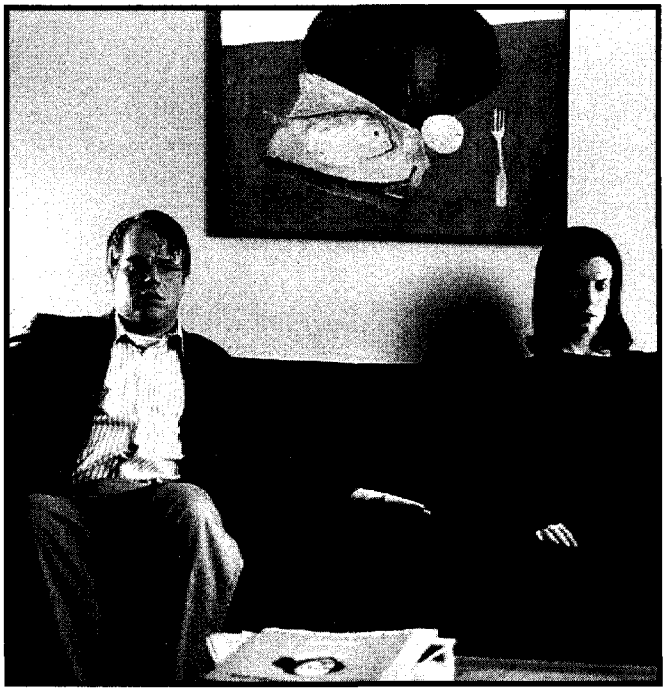

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To the Editors

Psychology & sin

I have enjoyed Sidney Callahan's thoughtful essays in *Commonweal*, including the recent one on the Clinton fiasco ["The Shaming of America," November 6]. I do disagree, however, with her use of the term "sexual addiction." This is not yet an officially recognized diagnostic category, though it is likely to be if the American Psychiatric Association persists in its program of "medicalizing" all deviations and variations of human behavior.

The compulsive, reckless, and self-destructive qualities of sin have been well known for centuries. So has sinfulness as a habit of being. In this matter, modern psychology has added little to ancient understanding.

The propensity to convert the deadly sins into diagnostic terms and thereby explain them away cheapens our culture, diminishes our sense of individual responsibility, and blunts our perception of the reality and tragedy of our ever-failing struggle toward the Good.

Psychological factors are always operative in human behavior. They hardly ever explain it.

BERNARD MACKINNON
Yarmouth, Maine

The real issues

For Sidney Callahan to analyze the president's sexual behavior while ignoring the serious charges brought against him is circuitous and misses the mark.

The polluted air and the smog she refers to include much more than the president's sexual behavior, as despicable as that is. The president raised his hand and swore before God and the court to tell the truth. Then he lied. He also lied to all the people on television.

What are we to do about this behavior? And the obstruction of justice? And the abuse of power? These are the issues of real consequence in a nation built on liberty under law, and these, therefore, are the issues we need to focus on when we analyze the president's behavior. The sexual behavior is so much distraction.

JOHN CLANCY
Wyandotte, Mich.

The writer replies:

Bernard MacKinnon rightly corrects my loose use of the term "sexual addiction." *Mea Culpa*. But I plead innocent to relieving Clinton of moral responsibility by "medicalizing" his deviant behavior. As I said in the column, "most addictions emerge after repeated choices that are voluntary; slowly a habit become ingrained, and it becomes compulsive." I also said that moral resistance is still possible and that a person remains morally responsible to seek help, or not deny the help that is offered by others.

I also agree that "the compulsive, reckless, and self-destructive qualities of sin have been well known for centuries." What I can't fathom is how and when to distinguish sin from addiction. They are both manifestations of a person. Perhaps only God can read hearts and make these ultimate judgments. But the rest of us have to morally judge behavior. Even addicted drunken drivers who kill pedestrians go to jail.

I also agree with John Clancy that for a president to lie under oath, and to his family, cabinet, and the public, is worse than his sexual wrongdoing. Perjury and the obstruction of justice should be the central focus of the impeachment process. But since Clinton's public lies were about his sexual behavior, sex can hardly be an irrelevant distraction. Nor can Clinton's sexual behavior be irrelevant in judging his character.

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

Sanctions not justified

I want to express dismay over and strong disagreement with the analysis and conclusion by George A. Lopez in his article on "The Sanctions Dilemma" [September 11]. His conclusion: "In the case of Iraq, the moral ground continues to rest with sanctions." Whose morality justifies 500,000 deaths? Not mine. I agree that no exaggeration of numbers is necessary. Without any exaggeration our relentless pursuit of Saddam, both during the Gulf War, which Lopez does not include in his analysis, and in the eight years of sanctions following, has involved overkill. "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" Our answer, taking on the role of a god, has not been what God answered Abraham.

What would Jesus do? Lopez might consider meeting with some of the people who undertook fasts and vigils to protest the sanctions. Setting goals such as "to denuclearize the Middle East" and "controlling these weapons in the tough cases like Iraq" does not justify what is indeed an "unacceptable tragedy." We cannot pretend that we are innocent of these deaths; Saddam's intransigence does not excuse our own, nor do his misdeeds justify ours.

BETTY MCELHILL
Pismo Beach, Calif.

The power of print

Recently our pastor gathered some of us together to explore the topic of "evangelization." He began by asking each of us: "Who evangelized you?" Some mentioned their parents, others a favorite aunt or teacher, etc. When it came my turn I said that I was evangelized by a magazine.

I went to work in 1950 as a geologist in Maracaibo, Venezuela, and experienced a severe culture shock on encountering the church in Latin America. In those days *Time* magazine would occasionally quote *Commonweal*, and I managed to get a sub-

(Continued on page 28)

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Bishops & pols

Diminishing respect for the inalienable right to life and...the elimination of legal protections for those who are most vulnerable" threaten American society. That was the warning issued late last month by the National Council of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) in its statement, "Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics." On November 22, five days after the NCCB spoke, Doctor Jack Kevorkian appeared on "60 Minutes" to confirm the bishops' diagnosis in grisly detail. Kevorkian, already responsible for assisting in the suicides of 130 people, now boasts of having taken the inevitable next step: he claims to have directly killed someone. To promote his "cause" and goad law enforcement into arresting him yet again, Kevorkian presented "60 Minutes" with a videotape, which the program dubiously decided to air, of the consenting victim's final moments. Kevorkian, who has been acquitted in three jury trials on charges of assisting in the suicide of his "patients," is determined to "broaden" still further this culture's definition of permissible killing.

"Living the Gospel of Life" condemns the seemingly irreversible tide of abortion, the increasing drift toward legalized euthanasia, and the popular resort to capital punishment. It is the first NCCB document explicitly to call Catholic politicians to account on these issues, and as a consequence it was the subject of intense debate within the conference and some significant last-minute revision. The document wisely avoids issuing any broad sanctions against individual politicians. Rights of conscience are too easily abused by such tactics. But neither do the bishops mince words in constructing what Cardinal William Keeler of Baltimore called the statement's "theology of persuasion." These questions cannot be finessed by claiming to be privately opposed to abortion or euthanasia, but supportive of the right of others "to choose." Abortion and euthanasia, the bishops argue, are not merely private matters. "Catholic public officials who disregard church teaching on the inviolability of the human person indirectly collude in the taking of innocent life," they write. "We urge those Catholic officials...to consider the consequences for their own spiritual well being, as well as the scandal they risk by leading others into serious sin....no appeal to policy, procedure, majority will, or pluralism ever excuses a public official from defending life to the greatest extent possible." In short, Catholics must "work peacefully and tirelessly" to change current abortion law and to oppose efforts to legalize physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia.

The bishops are most persuasive when they place abortion and euthanasia within the context of the church's "consistent ethic of life," condemning any resort to violence to defend the unborn, voicing opposition to the death penalty, and reiterating their support for the poor and other victims of injustice. They urge Americans to see how the rights of the unborn and the infirm are grounded in this nation's great historical and constitutional commitments to democracy and human dignity. No self-righteous indictment, the statement also calls to account the bishops' own failures: "We need to redouble our efforts to evangelize and catechize our people on the dignity of life and the wrongness of abortion." In fact, the man euthanized by Kevorkian identified himself as a Catholic.

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The rejection of recent state referenda criminalizing late-term abortions shows that most Americans remain suspicious of the perceived religious and absolutist tenor of the prolife movement. That is unfair and unfortunate. As liberal prolife Catholics know, absolutism is very much alive on the pro-choice side as well. "My own view," the theologian Stanley Hauerwas recently noted, "is that within a hundred years, Christians may be known as those odd people who don't kill their children or their elderly." The Catholic bishops want to be more optimistic than Hauerwas about American society, but as "Living the Gospel of Life" argues, that won't be easy unless American Catholics rise to the challenge.

NOTEBOOK

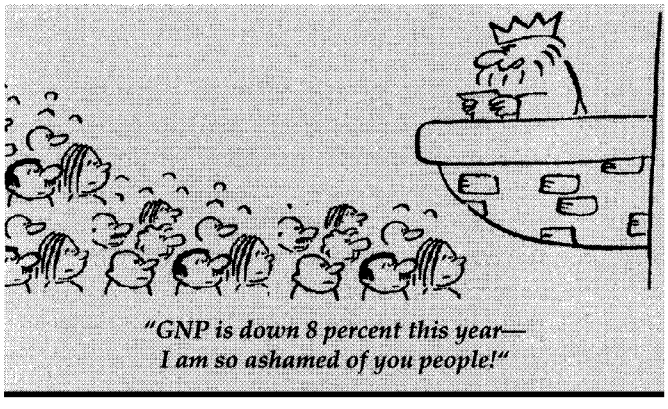
ECONOMICS À LA TOKYO

Foreign concepts?

Many economies are in trouble, perhaps none more than Japan's. It is the economy that Robert Rubin, U.S. secretary of the Treasury, loves to hector. While spearheading salvage operations in Thailand, South Korea, Indonesia, Russia, and Brazil with the seeming benevolence of a rich uncle, he scolds the Japanese for not pulling themselves out of the doldrums.

Of course, it is more than a curiosity that the miracle economy of the 1980s has fallen so low, and stayed low for so long. Even more puzzling: the Japanese people put up with it. They re-elect the same politicians, and corporate leaders seem immune from stockholder wrath. Explanations abound: corruption, interlocking directorships, too little consumerism, and too much fish-eating. Having once visited Tokyo and been mightily impressed with Japanese diligence, I would have thought that energy and hard work alone would have ended their recession.

But perhaps these qualities turn out to be part of the problem. Nicholas Kristof, who reports from Japan for the *New York Times*, has written two stories that point up the Japanese dilemma in dealing with their recession: their sense of social solidarity means that no one is allowed to sink in bad times. In a nation of small shops and small factories, businessmen and civic leaders consider themselves duty-bound to keep things going, even when they are losing money hand over fist.



"GNP is down 8 percent this year— I am so ashamed of you people!"

What appears to Americans as inefficiency and even failure to take account of the bottom line is in Japan respect for *giri-ninjo*—duty and empathy, for example, to one's employees and conversely to one's employer. Takahiro Tanaka admitted to Kristof that he went out of the jewelry business because he could neither layoff employees nor ask them to take a pay cut, even though he believed that they would accept one: "I just couldn't bring myself to do such a thing" (*New York Times*, April 21, 1998). Mr. Tanaka's principles may have bankrupted his business, but Japan's low unemployment rate suggests that many other companies are keeping people who are no longer productively employed.

The same practices are at work in municipal government. In the small town of Ichinosetakahashi, there is a primary school with one teacher and one principal that educates one child, Daiki Saito, at a cost of $175,000 a year (*New York Times*, October 26,1998). This would drive U.S. taxpayers nuts. But in the principal's view, "If we just pursue efficiency, the world would become a very dry place, with no sensitivity." According to Kristof, the Japanese see these practices as part of their democratic and egalitarian way of life (a way of life, let us recall, introduced to them only fifty years ago by General Douglas MacArthur and the U.S. occupation forces). Clearly their notions of democracy and equality have been linked to an older and still vibrant sense of civic virtue—social solidarity and social harmony. Kristof writes, "Japan seems troubled by economic changes that are beneficial overall but that make losers out of some people."

What a contrast to Brazil, where the gap between rich and poor, the largest in the world, continues to grow, even as the government takes on another $42 billion in loans from the IMF. The Brazilian economy has been deemed too large to fail—except, of course, for the human losers, exactly those whom the Japanese act to protect. Furthermore, there is no guarantee or historical evidence that, if Brazil overcomes its current crisis, the gap between rich and poor will be significantly narrowed.

Do we have something to learn from Japan? Let me enter here the usual disclaimers about the insularity of Japan, its history of racism and xenophobia, and its high demand for conformity and compliance, and yet ask whether the Japanese have something to teach us in the context of the current economic crisis. When Western bankers and officials call for an end to Japanese inefficiencies and cronyism, aren't they saying be more like the Brazilians, more like Americans, lay people off, close schools, and end subventions to small farmers and marginal businesses? But maybe we should turn the question around: Why aren't Americans, Brazilians, the Russians, etc., more like the Japanese in our sense of *giri-ninjo*, duty and responsibility? Inherent in the Japanese practice of social solidarity, there seems to me a finely honed sense of social justice, which, if emulated elsewhere, would make the human costs of globalization easier to bear.

MARGARET O'BRIEN STEINFELS

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ABIGAIL McCARTHY

A CAPITAL NEIGHBORHOOD

In defense of Washington, D.C.

The city I live in—the capital of the United States—has a bad reputation. According to a recent survey by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, a majority of Americans say they would refuse a good job offer in Washington, D.C., if it meant they would have to live within the city limits. An even larger proportion of Americans say they have a more negative impression of Washington than they have of New York City. Washington was faulted for drug-related crime, poor local government and leadership, racial problems, and transportation and traffic problems.

Yet most of the people who live here like the city. It is home. They do all the things people do in other cities—drive car pools, go to their children's baseball and soccer games, shop for groceries, follow the local sports, and fill the city's churches on weekends. Among those who have come to Washington's defense is Geneva Overholser, who came here from the Midwest a few years ago to be the *Washington Post*'s ombudsman, and clearly is glad she did.

"The place is full of interesting people," she wrote in a op-ed piece in the *Post*, "the Metro is great, the foliage is lush, the monuments are grand, and the fireworks are the best. Neither ocean nor mountains are far away, the historical sites and museums are a rich feast...." She goes on to write of improvements on the political and civic scenes, with worthy mayoral candidates from both parties, a new police chief, a new superintendent of schools, and a new city manager. She refers to the nationally known universities located here.

But there is an aspect of Washington even more likable than those Overholser has listed. Washington is a city of neighborhoods—each a community where people put down their roots, bring up their children, and form life-long ties with neighbors. This is the side of Washington which surprised and impressed a well-known newcomer, Dr. Nils Hasselmo, former president of the University of Minnesota and current president of the American Association of Universities.

"This did not strike me on previous visits to Washington," he said. "Of course, one does not get a real sense of a city from a hotel room. But when my wife and I started looking for a place to live here we noticed the sense of intimacy with which people spoke of where they lived. They said, "We live in Cleveland Park or Chevy Chase or (as we do now) in Woodley Park. On weekends now when we go to the open-air market at one end of the neighborhood or the other, we enjoy the small-town feel."

What binds these neighborhoods are threads of shared connections—often surprising. This last summer, for example, the neighborhood of East Georgetown celebrated Buster Jackson Day. Banners streamed across the street and Mount Zion's church hall was packed to mark the retirement of a man who, in the words of the neighborhood paper, "is beloved by his circle of friends and community as an extraordinary person."

Georgetown is generally thought of as an enclave only of the distinguished and the affluent. But of Claude "Buster" Jackson, a fixture of a neighborhood market for fifty years, it has been said that he was the neighborhood's soul. For most of those fifty years, people were drawn to the tiny store by his warmth and good nature. According to the *Washington Post*, every morning neighbors collected at the market, often before it was open, tapping on the window for Jackson to let them in. He knew everyone, where they lived, and what went on in their families. He took children seriously and made them welcome. He also, it was reported, gently taught those inclined "to swipe" things not to steal, exchanging kind words and loose grapes for hidden candy.

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Before Buster retired, neighbors spoke of the store as a haven. The store is "a gathering place where people come in with their kids and all their problems and sit around and chat with Buster," one said. "I go by and buy things when I don't really need them, just to see Buster. He's a blessing." I, too, lived in that neighborhood for a few years and Buster has been delivering groceries to me ever since. He is indeed a blessing—warm and welcoming on the phone, a cheerful presence when he arrives.

Claude "Buster" Jackson started out as a thirteen-year-old delivery boy in the 1940s when the neighborhood was still a mix of black and white families. A scattering of black residents are still there. Theaters, schools, and buses were not yet integrated but playgrounds were, so, as a fifth-generation Georgetowner, he grew up with white friends, noted the *Post* writer, Marylou Tousignant. His love of baseball and his skill at the bat earned him the nickname, shortened from "fence-buster." He went on to semiprofessional ball, was on the city's first integrated American Legion team, and played in the Tri-State and Northern Virginia semipro leagues while continuing to work at the market. He never really left the neighborhood. He himself modestly ascribes his popularity to the fact that "these days longevity on the job is pretty rare. There is too much change in peoples' lives."

Not every neighborhood has such an outstanding and unifying personality as Buster Jackson, but he exemplifies the way in which residents of our community neighborhood are present and known to each other. As Doctor Hasselmo said, it makes for pleasant living. Despite the trepidation of those polled by Hart Research, taking a job in Washington is not really a bad thing to do. □

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Patrick J. Lucey

THE BUCK STOPS HERE

Feingold's bottom line

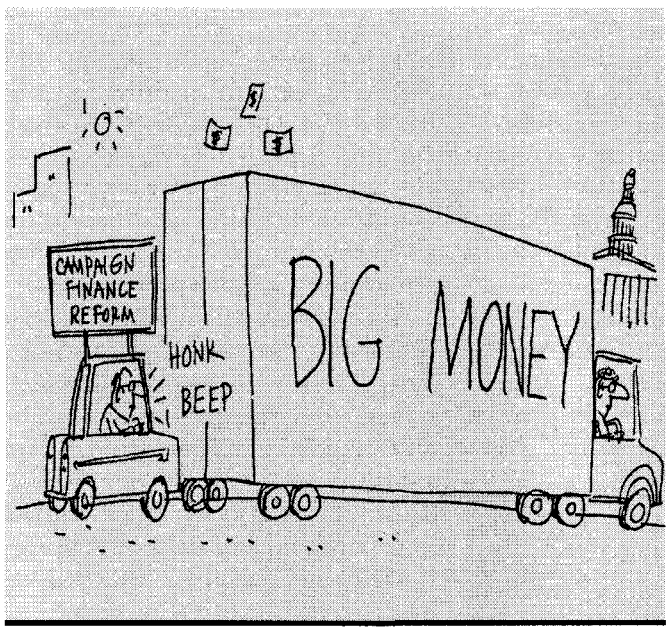
The election of November third is history. No one got it right. The prognosticators and the partisans all called it wrong. The Republican sweep that could be expected both on an historical basis and according to early polls just didn't happen.

The aftermath has been equally surprising. Who would have guessed, a few months ago, that in January 1999, Newt Gingrich would be a private citizen and Bill Clinton would be polishing up his seventh State of the Union Address? With all that has happened, why should the readers of a thoughtful periodical like *Commonweal* be interested in reviewing the campaign of one U.S. Senator from Wisconsin who, despite the national Democratic trend, managed to eke out the narrowest of victories? What makes this race more significant than several others we could talk about?

Russ Feingold could have won big; he chose not to! He is a rare breed among our present crop of political office holders. He was willing to put principle above winning.

During his nearly six years in office, he has co-sponsored on a bipartisan basis a number of significant bills; but he is probably best known for his work with Senator John McCain (R-Ariz.) on campaign-finance reform.

In endorsing Russ Feingold in the Democratic primary of 1992, I paraphrased Adlai Stevenson to the effect that as "important as is winning, deserving victory is even of greater import." That was an accurate assessment of the Feingold effort then, but it describes his 1998 effort even more dramatically. It would have been so easy and really quite understandable if he had reasoned that the McCain-Feingold bill ought to be the law of the land but since, despite his best efforts, it was not, it was legitimate to follow current campaign-spending rules in seeking re-election.



Feingold did not choose that course. He, in effect, engaged in unilateral disarmament. This strategy carried a high risk. It kept his loyal supporters up most of election night, but the final vote was Feingold 892,643, Republican challenger Mark Neumann 856,351. That spread of only 46,282 votes represented a margin of about four or five votes per precinct. His opponent on election night rather ungraciously pointed out that if you subtract the margin by which Russ carried liberal Dane County (65,849) Neumann would have won.

The important thing is that Feingold survived and with his victory the prospects for campaign-finance reform is greatly enhanced. When asked in an interview on election night whether he had any regrets about refusing the help of soft money, Feingold assured the reporter that he did not. This was at a time when the outcome was still in doubt. The reporter followed up with the thought that the decision might have cost Feingold the election. The candidate answered that he would rather lose than win with the help of what he described as "legal bribery."

Wisconsin has a long tradition of progressive reform government. We have been especially concerned about campaign finance. Former Senator William Proxmire made a point of seeking repeated re-election with virtually no expenditures at all. In my own case, I ran for governor three times (twice successfully). My expenditures never exceeded $600,000. Had Neumann won, this would no longer be a state where a candidate could hope to do well without a huge infusion of out-of-state money.

With inflation and more extensive use of television, even in Wisconsin campaigning has become more costly. Feingold pledged that he would limit his spending to one dollar per eligible voter in the state. He managed to adhere pretty closely to that target, spending $3.8 million (the estimated number of eligible Wisconsin voters in 1996 was 3.78 million). Much as he resisted any independent expenditures on his behalf, total expenditures intended to advance his cause exceeded $5 million. His opponent spent in excess of $11 million.

A few of the many provisions of the McCain-Feingold bill that Feingold pledged to follow in his re-election campaign included the following:

- No franked mass mailings during the campaign year.
- At least 75 percent of total dollars spent would come from Wisconsin individuals.
- All Federal Elections Commission reports filed electronically.
- No more than 10 percent of total dollars raised will come from political action committees.
- Will not participate in the raising of soft money.
- He also suggested that he and his opponent withhold all television ads until August 8.

Passage of the McCain-Feingold legislation would write these and like provisions into law. In the 1998 campaign,

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Feingold, and I believe Senator McCain as well, led by example. In the Feingold campaign it was obvious that Senator Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) was as much his opponent as Congressman Neumann. As chairman of the Republican Senate Campaign Committee, McConnell has opposed any substantive campaign-finance reform legislation. He apparently was convinced that if he could beat Feingold in Wisconsin the issue would go away.

Was the election a referendum on campaign finance reform? Probably not in the view of most voters. But suffice it to say that the re-election of Russ Feingold gives this body of reform a chance to fight again. Though there was a majority in each house for reform in the last Congress, the leadership did everything it could to deny those sentiments effective expression.

One of the big barriers to campaign finance reform is that it has to be enacted by people who got elected under the existing corrupt system. Since not all have the courage of a Russ Feingold they need to be pushed in the right direction. Every thoughtful citizen, irrespective of party affiliation, ought to join in giving the nation the full benefit of the re-election of Senators McCain and Feingold. The changes in congressional leadership at this juncture make this an ideal time to press for this reform. □

Patrick J. Lucey *is a former governor of Wisconsin (1971–77) and former U.S. ambassador to Mexico (1977–79).*

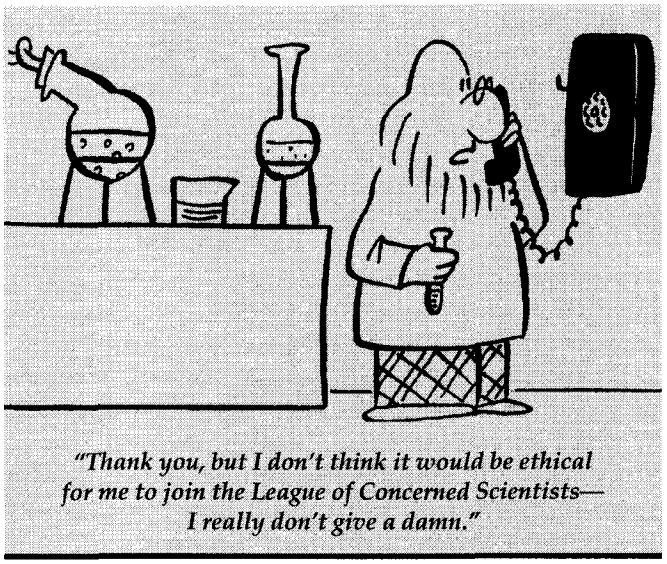
Thomas A. Shannon

REMAKING OURSELVES?

The ethics of stem-cell research

In the first week of November, articles in both *Science* and the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* reported the stunning news that human stem cells have been isolated and cultivated. These cells are the precursors of the entire human body. The capacity to isolate and cultivate them means that we have the potential ability to produce tissue in the laboratory for use in generating new tissue, in developing new organs for transplantations, as well as cells for use in gene therapy.

In one line of research, the cells were taken from the inner cell mass of the blastocyst stage—one of the earliest stages in the development of the human preimplantation embryo. It is from these undifferientated cells that the entire embryo and fetus will develop. These particular blastocyst cells were taken from preimplantation embryos left over from fertility treatments that were not going to be used in further *in vitro* fertilization attempts. In the second line of research, using aborted fetuses, the cells were taken from their embryonic germ cells that would not develop into specific body parts but into new eggs or sperm.



"Thank you, but I don't think it would be ethical for me to join the League of Concerned Scientists—I really don't give a damn."

Herein lies the nub of the ethical issue: What is the moral status of the very early human embryo and of the tissue of an aborted fetus? In both lines of research, the teams of scientists recognize that the cells *do* have moral status since they come from human embryonic material. While I agree totally, I see a distinction between those cells drawn from the human preimplantation embryo and those obtained from aborted fetuses. While I do not agree with them, the group working on embryonic germ cells (the ones from aborted fetuses) claims that the use of these cells presents no particular problem because such cells could not be the precursor of a fetus; even so, they too recognize the special status of the human tissue.

I would argue that because the process of what biologists call differentiation has not yet occurred in the preimplantation embryo, such an entity is not individualized; it therefore lacks a core feature of personhood. This is so for two reasons: First, the cells in this entity have the capacity to become some (pluripotent) or any (totipotent) part of the body—and therefore the preimplantation embryo cannot be understood to be a single individual. For by definition, an individual is an entity that cannot be divided or, if it is, it becomes two halves neither of which can survive on its own. Second, the cells of the preimplantation embryo can be separated without harm to the organism (for example, in preimplantation diagnosis, one or two cells can be removed and examined for genetic disease). Further, the cells can be divided artificially to form twins. Finally, each of the cells has the potential to be another whole individual. My argument is that since the entity at this stage is not yet individualized, it lacks a critical, though not the only, criterion for personhood.

So how might we think of such an entity? Let me suggest an idea developed by the medieval philosopher Duns Scotus, though, of course, he had no clue about stem cells. His concept may help us get a handle on how to think about this entity in order to come to some ethical resolution about the development and use of embryonic stem cells. This argu-

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ment does not apply to the use of embryonic germ cells, that is, to cells obtained from aborted fetuses, because individuation has already happened.

Scotus uses the term "common nature" to describe what is common to both the group and the individual. The term is part of his larger theory of knowledge and individualization. "Common nature" is essentially the basis for the definition of any entity, what all horses share in common, for example. But what horses share in common is indifferent to whether we are referring to a singular horse or to all horses. For Scotus, then, the common nature needs something else—an individualizing principle—to constitute a particular horse. Scotus's principle of individuation constricts, as he says, the form of this common nature into an individual, rendering this being unique, distinct from all others of the same species, and indivisible. In short, it has a singular unity; it is incapable of being divided into two wholes.

We can think of the preimplantation embryo as our common human nature for two reasons. First, even though this entity is genetically distinct from its parents and even genetically unique, it is not yet individualized. Individualization does not occur until after the process of restriction is completed, some two weeks after the process of fertilization. To my mind, this process is a biological analogy to Scotus's concept of the principle of individuation, the constricting of the common nature into an individual. After the process is completed (normally after two weeks), the cells are committed to being specific cells in specific body parts. This is the biological beginning of true (though not full) individuality and, I would argue, marks a critical ethical line.

However, prior to that time, these human cells are indifferent to becoming specific cells in this particular body. They are not, I would argue, morally privileged by virtue of individuality or, *a fortiori*, by personhood. True, they are morally privileged by being human cells, cells that manifest the human genome, and as such are an entity that represents the essence of human nature. This is the second reason why the preimplantation embryo can be understood in terms of Scotus's "common nature." Essentially such research would be utilizing cells that in fact represent what is common to humans in the most basic sense; our common human nature in the blastomere is preindividual and prepersonal. And because these cells are our common human nature and not individualized human nature (the minimal definition of personhood), I argue that cells from this entity may be used in research to obtain and develop stem cells for use in transplantation or to develop specific human tissue or perhaps even organs.

Clearly those from whom such entities come must consent to this research, and the blastomeres must be handled with respect. But ultimately, such research is not research on a human person. It is research on our common human nature, and as such is morally justifiable. □

Thomas A. Shannon *is professor of religion and social ethics at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts.*

The cows come home

The announcement (*New York Times*, November 12, 1998) that scientists have implanted a human nucleus in the enucleated egg of a cow—have in fact produced a hybrid entity that is largely but not entirely human—demonstrates not only the speed at which such research moves but also the ever-more complicated ethical tangles into which we have gotten ourselves.

Can we slow this down a little so that we can think about what we are doing?

Creating stem cells by fusing human cells with cow eggs is qualitatively different from other kinds of stem-cell research because we really don't know what will happen until we do it. Even though the human material reportedly took over rapidly and began producing human proteins, the interaction between bovine cytoplasm and human DNA cannot be fully modeled mathematically. And there are at least two other problems. If bovine mytrocondrial DNA remains in the cytoplasm, will it interact with the human DNA, and with what consequences? Will the blending of the two species be the occasion for cross-species diseases?

Although this particular research has not been verified or published, it was announced to test its public acceptability. While public reactions should certainly to be taken into account, what ethical method uses market research as a criterion? One would think that the company (Advanced Cell Technology of Worcester, Massachusetts) would want to argue that its research is both worthwhile and ethical, not simply that the public does not object to it.

If the bovine cytoplasm were to act only as a nutrient source, and if the human DNA were to take over totally, the resulting organism would have the human genome and would qualify as human. But that presents a whole new set of problems. For even though the technology was ostensibly developed to generate stem cells, other applications would be sure to follow—for example, a ready supply of bovine eggs for use in assisted human reproduction.

Who approved this research? Not the full Institutional Review Board at the University of Massachusetts, where the scientists work. It was given administrative approval without review. Because of its uniqueness and because it created a hybrid, I would argue that the experimentation should have had full review. And now, given the need to sift through all of the recently reported stem-cell research, I would further argue that there should be a moratorium on the hybrid research.

Still, the barn door looks like it's open.

T.A.S.

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A TIME TO WAIT

An Advent reflection

Richard R. Gaillardetz

On a hectic December morning several years ago, as I was getting ready to go to work, into our bedroom marched my then two-and- half-year-old son Brian, clad in nothing but a diaper, and holding a bottle of milk like a royal scepter. He looked at me, and in a triumphant voice proclaimed: "Jesus is coming!!!" But before I could congratulate myself for our having done such a fine job in Advent catechesis, he immediately followed that proclamation with a second: "Go! Go! Power Rangers!!" And with this solemn invocation of the superheroes of the day, he did an about-face and marched back into the living room.

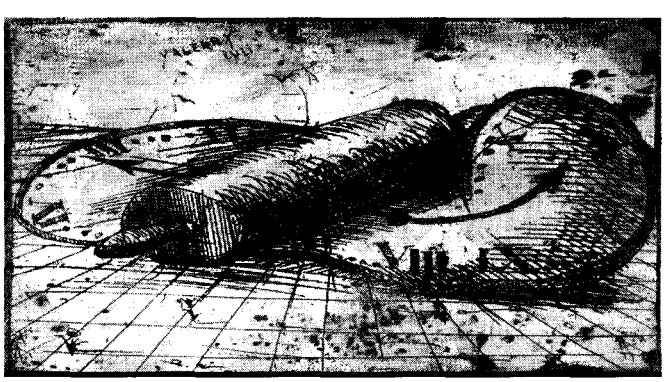
There is a way in which this brief encounter sums up the challenge of the Advent season: the confrontation between our faith and a culture often tone deaf to the values of Advent. One fundamental aspect of this confrontation (and it need not always be a confrontation) between faith and contemporary culture is the impact of modern technology on our experience of time.

The clock may be the most important machine of modern technology. Until the late thirteenth century, most clocks were either sundials or water clocks, both of which kept time by careful alignment with the rhythms of the natural world. With the advent of the mechanical clock in the fourteenth century, and its mass production in the nineteenth century, time became separated from natural rhythms, both internal (heartbeat, breathing, hunger patterns, for example) and external (the cycle of day and night, the annual seasons, etc.), to which premoderns aligned themselves. Once time could be measured in independent units apart from the consideration of internal or external rhythms, time began to appear "under our control." We are now encouraged to "make the most of our time," or to "use our time wisely." Human activities are increasingly measured by their time-efficiency.

Alongside clocks we might include microwave ovens, cell phones, pagers, home computers, and a myriad of other devices that modern technology offers us in our quest to conquer time. Let us consider but one, the microwave oven. Many of us now rely on microwave ovens for a good share of the cooking. At first the microwave oven was employed primarily to warm up left-overs, but now we have packaged microwave meals that help us save time by eliminating much of meal preparation. What microwaves offer us is a more efficient use of time. But they also change the way we "spend" time, for the time spent preparing a meal is also the best argument for its leisurely consumption. A meal which requires no preparation also lays little claim to sustained dinner interaction. Microwave meals are made, not just to be prepared quickly, but to be consumed quickly.

This is the paradox of our age: We can easily become so trapped in an endless spiral to purchase more technological gadgets which promise to help us "save" time that we have lost the ability to "spend" time. We no longer know how to luxuriate in the present because we are obsessed with technologically "banking" our time for some never-quite-realized future enjoyment. Even actively committed Christians tend to see the issue of time as one of finding a place for "religious time" in their busy lives. They will heroically carve out a place for brief daily prayer, Sunday Eucharist, children's catechesis, and perhaps a weeknight parish meeting of one kind or another. But what is forgotten is the invitation which the season of Advent offers us, not just to carve out some time for God, but to undergo conversion in our very experience of time. It is in Advent that we learn, not to master time, but rather to submit ourselves to the flow of God's time. In Advent we can learn the spirituality of waiting.

Advent, it is important to remember, draws our attention to two biblical pregnancies. To one young virgin, Mary, an angel announces the inexplicable—she shall bear a child. To another old and barren woman, Elizabeth, cousin to that young girl, the gift of pregnancy is also given. And in the womb of Eliz-



Richard R. Gaillardetz *teaches theology at the University of Saint Thomas School of Theology in Houston, Texas. His last article for* Commonweal *was "Proclaiming the Catholic Faith" (February 6, 1996).*

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abeth, the blessed leaps in the presence of the one who blesses. And so these two women wait—and with all the mothers of the world, they teach us how to wait. So let us submit to the pedagogy of mothers and the testimony of fathers and reflect on the lessons that come from bringing a child into the world.

First there is the news that there is to be a child. Often a woman realizes this almost intuitively, sensing the first changes in her body. Then the waiting begins. But it is a peculiar waiting, for there already is a child in the womb. And yet, in the beginning, particularly for the father, there are few discernible signs of what is to come. Therein lies the heart of the Advent spirit.

We can easily become so trapped in an endless spiral to purchase more technological gadgets which promise to help us "save" time that we have lost the ability to "spend" time.

Advent is a paradoxical season. It is to be a season of waiting, a season governed by anticipation. But what are we waiting for? We are waiting for the Christ who has already come and is to come again. Much like the child in the womb, we believe Christ to be present and yet we wait. We know what it is to wait for a guest to arrive; but waiting on a guest who has already arrived is another matter! And yet that is what Advent asks of us. In faith we must celebrate, even in our waiting, the reality of Emmanuel, God with us.

This is the central challenge for any spirituality. How do we discover God when the divine presence is not obvious? How do we find God when it is his absence which seems most evident? We must learn to cultivate, the mothers of the church remind us, attentiveness and contemplation.

As a pregnancy progresses into the second trimester the signs of new life become more observable. From the beginning the mother experiences a number of changes—some pleasant, many not so pleasant. Experienced mothers can feel the child move as early as seventeen weeks. For new mothers it may be as late as twenty weeks. What happens for a couple as the unborn child moves into the second trimester is the cultivation of a new kind of attentiveness. I recall Diana, my wife, telling me that as pregnancy progressed she became much more conscious of her body. Now obviously we are always embodied. We encounter the world through our bodies. But that doesn't mean that we are conscious of them. Frankly, we tend to take a lot of our bodily reality for granted. But when a woman is pregnant it is hard to take the body for granted. A pregnant mother is particularly attentive to the "text" of her own body.

As a father I found myself becoming more attentive as well. I had to attend to Diana's special needs for care as the pregnancy progressed. But I also found myself delighting in all sorts of things. I recall reclining in attentive silence next to my wife, like a bird watcher waiting in stillness for the call of a rare bird. I watched for the first discernible kick of the child in the womb. Later it was the chance sweep of an arm or leg across the interior womb creating a visible rippling across the abdomen, a teasing hint of that which was hidden.

There is so much in our lives that goes by unnoticed. Part of learning to wait for God has to do with being attentive to what is happening in our lives. As parents wait for the coming birth they become attentive to the simple signs of the child's presence, the small delights and joys that come their way with each milestone. In a similar way, finding God is a matter of attentiveness. The problem is that being attentive to the simple blessings of life is precisely what our culture makes so difficult. This kind of attentiveness requires a contemplative spirit. For most of us this contemplation must be exercised in the mundane. Our great spiritual tradition gives us the witness of Brother Lawrence who took comfort in finding the presence of God while washing dishes. Even today, the opportunity for such reflection can come in the commute home, in peeling potatoes, sweeping the kitchen floor, or tinkering under the hood of a car. These are times when the very simplicity or mindlessness of the task can be a means of quieting ourselves and focusing on the present. They can be times which invite us to be still and receptive to the graces of the moment.

One of the most difficult aspects of pregnancy for my wife was the experience of progressive confinement. Diana was not prepared for the way in which she quickly tired. This confinement was even more pronounced, not surprisingly, when she carried twins. She could not work the long hours to which she was accustomed. An agile and athletic woman, she found herself feeling clumsy and awkward. She had to learn not to fight the increased confinement and limits the pregnancy imposed on her.

How remarkably difficult it is to embrace confinement, the experience of limitation and constraint. Technology offers us a radical transcendence of confinement and limits. It lures us on with the offer of unlimited accessibility to all we desire. And yet a mother bearing a child reminds us of the grace of simply and freely embracing limits. To learn to wait is to learn that not everything can be or need be in our possession or immediately accessible to us. To learn to wait is to delight in what is at hand rather than to long for what is not. A mother bearing a child learns to delight in the spontaneous hiccups of the child she carries. She learns to embrace limits. In Advent each of us is invited to see a spirituality of waiting as an invitation to embrace limits ourselves.

After the waiting comes the final period of pregnancy, the weeks leading up to the birth. We have had four pregnancies. One ended in miscarriage, in two other pregnancies the

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onset of labor was artificially induced, and another came "naturally," which is to say, according to the child's schedule, not ours. The differences were striking. The miscarriage itself was a painful experience of the fragility of life and a sobering realization that we Catholics, for all our convictions about the sanctity of life from conception on, have a long way to go in learning to attend pastorally to those who suffer the pain of miscarriage. The experience of waiting for the "natural" onset of labor brought with it an awareness that the baby could come at any time. With every pain Diana experienced we wondered, "Was this it?" And then came the frenetic activity when labor actually began. Calling family and friends, getting the car packed. By contrast, the two cases in which labor was induced were far less tense; we had an appointment at the hospital and so knew several days in advance when labor would begin. It certainly allowed us to prepare for the event and minimize possible schedule conflicts.

Yet what made the pregnancy ending in the natural onset of labor so different was precisely that it was beyond our control. The baby was going to come according to his own schedule (we had all boys!). Waiting for the labor to begin was a profound lesson in abandonment, giving up control of our lives. That is why I think it so telling that today a far greater number of pregnancies end with artificially induced labor than was the case twenty years ago. Of course, many of these are for medical reasons, but more and more are not. I raise this concern with the confession that we, too, induced labor on one occasion for nonmedical reasons. The experience has led us to reflect more on what is lost in the experience of an artificially induced labor. When scheduling a birth around vacations and business trips is as easy as the scheduling of dental appointments, is there a danger of diminishing the sanctity of the birth itself? Are we losing one of the precious gifts that a pregnancy offers—namely the wonderful blessing that comes when we become receptive to that which is beyond our control.

In an analogous way, there is a depth and a texture to my experience of my children that often doesn't emerge in planned events but only in the "down time" when nothing important seems to be happening. For example, yesterday, driving my children home from preschool, I listened to my four-year-old making up a hymn with a spontaneous and hilarious mélange of disconnected religious images. It was a musical creation I would not have heard if I were on the cell phone taking care of business or listening to an audio-novel. Yet this "down time" is precisely what our reliance on technology so often eliminates. The hard truth is that we cannot plan for or manipulate God's grace. Like parents who are open and ready for the unpredictable onset of labor, our lives are blessed to the degree that we are receptive to the unplanned moment.

And with the birth of a child, waiting gives way to wonder. The child comes and it is a time of rejoicing. Few things are more incredible than holding a newborn infant close to your chest. This is what an Advent spirituality points toward. We await the coming of the Word incarnate only to discover that the Word has already come to us, into our daily world. When God chose to enter our world almost two thousand years ago, he came not as a king, but in the simplicity of a stable. God entered a world filled with mundane daily tasks for which few are canonized: the world of family and work, the world of daily labor, meal preparation, and household chores. He took all that is ordinary and, to our modern eyes, boring and without value, and he blessed it and made it holy.

Finally, the birth of a child also begets a new form of waiting, as we can only imagine the tale yet to be written in the child's life. When, later in his public ministry, Jesus returned to Nazareth, his reception there suggests that nothing in his childhood had prepared the residents for who he would become. And so, too, we wait for the final chapter of human history, to be written in the coming anew of the One who is already with us—present now under the veil of simple acts of kindness and gratitude, surprising eruptions of grace and blessing, moments snatched for reflection and contemplation. Amidst the noise of a culture that screams like a carnival huckster that time is growing short in this season of consumption, we must learn to wait in traffic, kitchens, classrooms, offices, and yes, even in church. We must wait with eyes wide open for signs that our guest is already with us, whispering a word of invitation to abide in him now and forever. □

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THE REBIRTH OF CITIZENSHIP

Public work for common goals

Harry C. Boyte & Nancy N. Kari

What has happened to the nation's common identity and vision of a shared future? More precisely, what has happened to the understanding of ourselves as the bearers of a great and noble mission—to keep democracy alive and well—that comes through so vividly in historical accounts such as Stephen Ambrose's "citizen-soldiers" (*see, Commonweal*, April 24)? To such questions of national purpose, the biblical narrative of Nehemiah might serve as a parable. It describes the reconstruction of a fractured, exiled people in the fifth century B.C. and how they rebuilt not only their city, but also their sense of destiny.

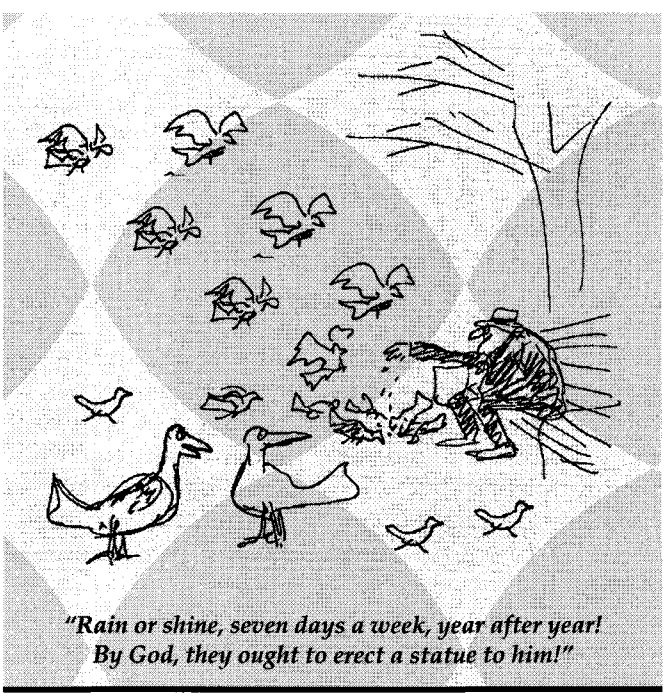
In 446 B.C., Nehemiah, a leader of the Jews living in exile in Persia, sought and obtained permission from King Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city which had lain in ruins for a century. Under Nehemiah's leadership, the returning exiles reconstructed the city and built a commonwealth relatively autonomous for its time.

The practical work of restoring Jerusalem's walls and rebuilding the Temple is key to the story. Ezra, the priest and scribe who immediately preceded Nehemiah to Jerusalem, admonished the people to rededicate themselves to the Jewish Law. But it was Nehemiah who called them to a work with large purpose. That work helped renew their bond to the ancient Covenant and reawakened their sense of themselves as creators of a living history. Together, the Covenant and common work constituted the religious and civic foundations of what has been called the "Second Commonwealth."

The Nehemiah story, however, also makes numerous other points, among them that even divinely inspired work projects are messy, complex, and full of human intrigue. How do you get forty disparate groups to cooperate in a single project: merchants, guilds, tribes, priests, all with their distinct constituencies and interests? And what happens when the whole thing goes off the track? Nehemiah had to craft a public process and hold selfish factions to account. When he learned that the nobles, for example, were making excessive profits from the poor, he called for a public assembly and challenged the leaders: "To the best of our power we have redeemed our brother Jews...and now you in turn are selling our brothers...." The nobles fell silent, but then replied: "We will make restitution" (5:6-12).

Current discussions of American democracy—and they seem to be legion—neglect such work-centered public involvement as a means of restoring public spiritedness and purpose. As a result, critics of our fragmented civil society often strike a hortatory tone, calling for a "return to family values." But historically, American identity—far more fractured by divisions of faith, culture, and ethnicity than the Jerusalemites—was tied to gritty, down-to-earth work for the public benefit. Such work created a practical quality to democracy and an expansive ideal that was able to bridge great differences. America's democratic spirit grew from the sense that the citizenry as a whole is responsible for the democratic experiment.

What we now call "volunteerism" was once understood as work for a common purpose, not merely *noblesse oblige*. In the past, ordinary people created and sustained American public goods and institutions—from libraries to schools to fire departments. Government, rather than being seen primarily as a service provider, was understood as a catalyst for citizen initiative. In recent decades, this understanding of citizenship,



"Rain or shine, seven days a week, year after year! By God, they ought to erect a statue to him!"

Harry C. Boyte and Nancy N. Kari *are co-authors of* Building America: The Democratic Promise of Public Work *(Temple, 1996).* **Boyte** *is senior fellow and co-director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs.* **Kari** *is director of faculty development at the College of Saint Catherine.*

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which sprang from common projects, has sharply declined.

In his *Outgrowing Democracy* (University Press of America, 1984), John Lukacs argued that the 1950s was a critical decade in which America changed from a "democratic order," with a generous, if somewhat facile, estimation of the capacities of ordinary people, to a "bureaucratic state" whose cultural orientation underestimates the capacities of "the democratic masses." Today's comic strip character Dilbert—lost in a maze of endless human-relations jargon—serves as a model of this new culture.

The Nehemiah story suggests a path to civic and moral renewal that challenges the "specialized" and fragmented notion of work characteristic of our time. Democracy depends on the sort of work that creates a *public* identity. The question we face today is: How do citizens, in an increasingly stratified, consumer-oriented, depersonalized society reconnect with a vibrant vision of democracy?

Catholic social teaching is a resource. It stresses that the common good is constituted and enriched through the work of individuals who co-create their world. In his 1981 encyclical, *On Human Work*, John Paul II writes that society "is a great historical and social incarnation of the work of all generations." Human beings combine their deepest personal identity with membership in a people, and intend their work to increase the common good. Catholic social teaching can thus make an important contribution to contemporary democratic movements by encouraging citizens and institutions to reclaim their public purpose.

For the past decade, the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute has drawn on such teachings, as well as other democratic traditions, in its focus on promoting "productive citizenship." The Center, working on the premise that substantial change in society depends on civic renewal of service-based institutions, has joined with schools, a nursing home, cooperative extension systems, an African-American hospital, public health departments, and a settlement house to promote grassroots civic involvement and change in institutional cultures. Two concepts are central: "public work" and "commonwealth."

Public work means sustained public effort—whether paid or unpaid—by a mix of people who undertake projects of civic usefulness. Public work highlights stake holding, ownership, accountability, and cooperative work. Expertise is important, but the experts do not dominate. Rather, they are part of a broad undertaking which draws out the talents of the community.

Commonwealth is the notion that a society's richness is related to its "public infrastructure"—such things as parks, libraries, roads, bridges—but also to government and other institutions that serve public purposes. There are many examples of public-spirited institutions in American history, including Catholic ones. They provide a sort of social and civic connecting tissue.

Since 1990, Public Achievement, the Center's civic-education effort with young people, has been working at Saint Bernard's School in a working-class neighborhood of Saint Paul, involving students in public-work projects. Teams of students between the ages of eight and eighteen, assisted by adult coaches, have designed and implemented a variety of civic programs; and almost all Saint Bernard's students have chosen to participate in Public Achievement. One group of fifth and sixth graders has been creating a safe neighborhood playground in an area that because of gang presence was thought to be "too dangerous." The students negotiated use of a lot from the parish, worked with the city for rezoning and street changes, and raised more than $40,000 to create the park. Another group, composed of seventh-grade girls, designed a curriculum about sexual harassment that has helped improve the culture of the neighborhood. The archdiocesan paper, *The Catholic Spirit*, reported that Public Achievement's dual emphases—"the secular portion (teaching democratic action) and the religious side (living out faith-based principles)—make up the real story at Saint Bernard's: the demands of faith are not met solely within the walls of one's church."

Moreover, schools themselves are changed through their involvement with Public Achievement. According to Dennis Donovan, a past principal at Saint Bernard's, "faculty meetings have become public meetings; teachers help to create agendas and they do regular public evaluations." A number of teachers have become involved with educational issues affecting the larger community, adding a deeper civic dimension to their individual and institutional identities.

On the college level, the institutions themselves have lost a robust sense of civic identity and involvement. The dominant understanding of citizenship has generally been exercised through community-service programs. But these are often at a far remove from the institution's core priorities. Thus for the concept of civic renewal to really take hold in such an environment, a substantial cultural change is needed.

In recent years, the College of Saint Catherine in Saint Paul has undertaken such a process, promoting the concepts of public work and citizenship. It has revised its core curriculum, added a common social justice course, and spawned a number of innovative partnerships with the broader community.

One example is its work with the Jane Addams School for Democracy in the West Side neighborhood of Saint Paul. The Addams School grew out of a partnership among Neighborhood House (a settlement house), the Center for Democracy and Citizenship, and the college. Students, faculty, and new immigrants— Hmong and Latinos—are working to create a "school" where mutual learning about language, culture, and citizenship occurs. Public work is a central element. Rather than simply provide services to needy groups, students are engaged with a mix of people in common projects. According to Mary Broderick, at the time Saint Catherine's interim

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president, this involvement is emblematic of the type of education the college is developing: "We link students to collaborative community work where they can experience their own potential for renewing society. Rather than focus on career preparation, we aim for learning that deepens professional identity and prepares for a life of meaning and purpose."

In a managerial world dominated by the values of the marketplace, it is daunting to imagine a vibrant, citizen-centered democracy. Calls for "community spirit" in a fragmented, unequal society sound quixotic. Yet the changes at both Saint Bernard's and Saint Catherine's suggest the powerful lesson of the Nehemiah story: Common work for large purpose, drawing upon the talents and capacities of ordinary people, can rebuild civic cultures. If similar acts of civic renewal were to take place widely, as the National Commission for Civic Renewal, chaired by Sam Nunn and William Bennett, has suggested, Americans would be able to regenerate an understanding of democracy worthy of our great history. One thing is certain: Only if Americans learn again that democracy is the work of everyone can we hope to reclaim our collective identity as a free, creative people for whom "democracy" forms a common bond. □

SCREEN

Richard Alleva

NOT A PRETTY PICTURE

'Happiness'

There is an as yet unnamed school of American playwrighting and moviemaking which I, of course, propose to name. Call it Revenge of the Ex-Geeks. Its members include David Sedaris (a frequent monologuist on National Public Radio as well as a playwright), John Waters (director of *Serial Mom* and *Pecker*), Tony Kushner (his *Angels in America* shows what happens when a geek has promethean ambition), Todd Haynes (creator of an extraordinary film, *Safe*), and the currently most visible ex-geek champ, the screenwriter-director, Todd Solondz. Having endured a childhood full of schoolyard taunting and parental beady-eyed suspicion, the geek finally rears up and asks, "Hey, why am I called sick when all of society is sick?" And, "Why should I be labeled a geek when, in their hearts, my jock tormentors and parental accusers are themselves creeps and weirdoes and, unlike me, in denial about it?"

This gives the lad a new lease on life. Geek is Good. He goes on to write books, plays, and movies which prove his suspicions about the world to his own satisfaction and, if the work is funny or probing, to the satisfaction of many others. A possible drawback: no one wears as much emotional armor as the revitalized geek, and no one is so concerned with proving that there are no exceptions—nay, none!—to his take on the world. In a play or film of the Geek Revenge school, the middle class is composed entirely of practicing or potential psychos. Scratch a banker and find a serial killer; enter a suburban home and fall into hell.

In his first film, *Welcome to the Doll House*, Todd Solondz gave us a relatively restrained and often touching example of the genre. Its junior-high heroine, Dawn "Wienerdog" Wiener, isn't surrounded by absolute monsters but only the usual assortment of Philistines, snobs, and slobs we all grew up with (and, upon occasion, were). She puts herself through a miserable apprenticeship in how the world works by pursuing schemes that she thinks will gain her that world's acceptance. Nothing succeeds, of course. In the concluding shot, our heroine sits on the school bus surrounded by the classmates who still despise her. They sing the school song and she joins in. Is Dawn still aspiring to normalcy? But the camera draws close to her face which we see is stoically set rather than ingratiating, while the soundtrack separates her voice from the others so that she seems to be singing to herself rather than with the others. We sense that she will grow up, probably get slightly prettier and more self-confident, hold down a job, maybe acquire a husband and children, and achieve a generally plausible life. But, in some fundamental way, she will never, never "fit in." The herd has marked her as a pariah, and a pariah she

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will remain. Her recognition of this is her tragedy and triumph.

In his latest film, the ultra-black comedy *Happiness*, Solondz goes further by showing us that there is no stable society to fit into and that individuals can only pursue, in lonely desperation, whatever happiness they can, a search that is bound to end in failure since there is no such thing as happiness.

Happiness 's nominal protagonists are three sisters: Trish, a housewife; Helen, a popular writer; and Joy, an unsuccessful songwriter. The first two seem to be successes, and Trish often burbles about her perfect life. But she's oblivious to the fact that her husband, Bill, is a homosexual pedophile whose pursuit of happiness is about to entail the rape of two boys. And Helen, regretful that she didn't suffer a childhood rape which would infuse her fiction with authentic *angst*, becomes momentarily enraptured with an obscene phone caller, who turns out to be her fat loser of a neighbor, Allen. Both of these women, in fact, are such monsters of fatuousness that they can't function as heroines of their own stories because monsters can't evince dramatic growth or deterioration. Instead, in the Trish segments, husband Bill becomes the focus of interest, especially since he is played with such disturbing naturalness by Dylan Baker. Solondz never makes the mistake of too facilely "understanding" Bill, or implying that his sexual aberration is a mere ailment easily correctable through therapy. In fact, Bill is a psychiatrist and this physician certainly hasn't healed himself. Far from it. The scene in which this sad pervert plies his entire family with sleeping pills so that he can have uninterrupted access to an eleven-year-old playmate of his son is sheer skin-crawling horror. (The fact that the director sometimes makes us giggle at Bill's predatory tactics simply adds to the horror. The victim is never mocked.)

Helen, the kinky writer, is soon overshadowed in her episodes by Allen, the telephonic pervert. So well do we come to understand his sodden existence and self-perpetuating hopelessness that we accept his falling into a sexless but affectionate relationship with a certain Christine, who is not only as fat as he is but (gulp) a murderer with body parts stored in her refrigerator. I'm so ashamed, she sobs after confessing to Allen. You must think I'm a monster! But gosh, nobody's perfect and Allen is perfectly content to spend a chastely affectionate night with Christine, though one certainly hopes he won't absentmindedly repair to the kitchen for a midnight snack.

Joy, being not only capable of change but downright desperate for it, is the only one of the sisters who holds the center of her own story. The actress Jane Adams makes Joy easily the most appealing character on the screen (not that there's much competition): compassionate, fairly intelligent, civic-minded, and, above all, ever hopeful in the pursuit of happiness. Precisely because of that last trait, Solondz visits one humiliation after another upon Joy's head because optimism is not taken lightly in Solondz land. And so, if Joy tries to break off with a boyfriend, he humiliates her in a public place; if she receives a phone call from a man she takes to be a more promising lover, he turns out to be the obscene caller; if she, a teacher of English to foreigners, refuses to go out on strike out of concern for her pupils, the students themselves jeer at her as a scab; when she seems to have found true love with a Russian émigré, he turns out to be a con man who steals her guitar and stereo—and then borrows money from her!

The unquenchable blackness of this black comedy springs not so much from the catastrophies in it as from the normalcy surrounding the catastrophies. That Bill abuses his son's playmate is sickening enough, but that he has been and continues to be a reasonably good father when he isn't being a pervert, dispensing liberal advice and emotional support, is somehow more disturbing. (Some viewers, to reassure themselves, might kid themselves into thinking that Bill's good behavior is just hypocrisy. It isn't.) When Christine confesses to being a murderer, it's startling, but even more disquieting is the way we can't help seeing her as a big, cuddly bear of a woman, physically and emotionally quite compatible with the lonely Allen, and he sees her that way

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even after learning of her crime. It's as if Paddy Chayefsky's *Marty* had been rewritten by the Marquis de Sade.

Solondz is a real artist in that he knows how to make the look and feel of his movie mirror its emotional content. The photography is deliberately kept as bland as a '70s situation comedy. The music is of the "Hi, honey, I'm home" variety, especially when it's the pedophile coming home. The editing is especially canny: Whenever a character is about to react to some painful truth or plea, the camera cuts away, so we are kept within the climate of frustration that all the characters inhabit.

But the Geek Revenge problem abides and somewhat abrades the undeniable brilliance of *Happiness*. It's just about impossible to make first-rate art featuring characters you are dedicated to unmasking and/or punishing. Because Solondz's feelings for Bill and Joy are ambivalent—a sort of compassionate loathing for him, an exasperated affection for her—the two emerge as the most interesting figures. But, in his determination to mock what he takes to be the factitious normalcy of middle-class life, especially as embodied in Trish, Solondz goes overboard. When Bill tells his wife he's sick, she advises him to take a Tylenol. True, she's half-asleep at that moment, but are we to think she'd be more perceptive if she were awake? I doubt it. And why would Joy's class of immigrants uniformly yell "scab" at her when they're benefiting from her strike breaking, and when surely none of them are union workers or even sympathizers? Why does the father of one of Bill's victims have to be portrayed as a bullet-headed macho-fascist? (Would a nice, liberal father react with less outrage to discovering his son had been raped?) By so insisting upon the crassness of his characters, Solondz often comes across as mean-spirited rather than truly satirical.

But, the abiding emotion *Happiness* leaves you with is sadness. At one point, Helen tells her sister, "We're not laughing at you, Joy, we're laughing *with* you." To which Joy replies, "But I'm not laughing." That is Solondz. He often makes us laugh, but he's not laughing. □

MEDIA

Frank McConnell

FUTURE PERFECT

'Welcome to Paradox'

Theodore Sturgeon was one of the truly fine writers of science fiction, and at a s-f convention in the late fifties—well before the genre became academically respectable—he shocked his audience by announcing what has come to be known, among fans and writers, as "Sturgeon's Law." "Let's face it," he began his talk, "90 percent of science fiction is crap." And, after the expected gasp from the assembly, he continued: "Ninety percent of everything is crap!"

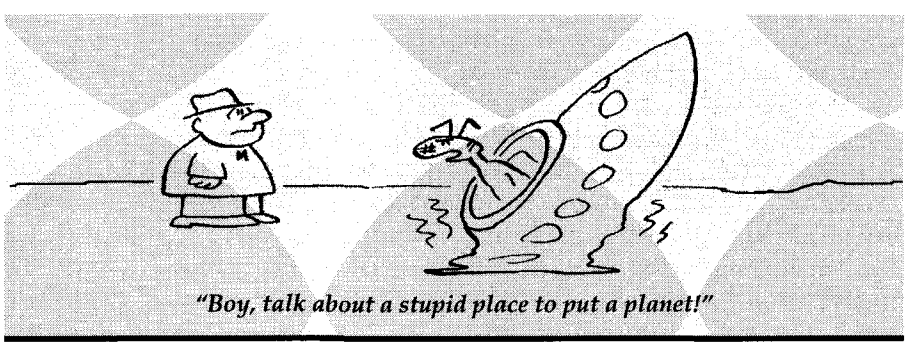
Wise words from a good man; though, if Sturgeon had ever written about the quality of s-f on TV, he would probably have ratcheted up the crap-quotient. The simple, sad fact is that TV has done very poorly by s-f. Oh, yeah, there's "Star Trek"—which the mighty Harlan Ellison refers to as "Star Dreck"—and its latter-day clones, and there's Rod Serling's apparently never-to-be-out-of-reruns "Twilight Zone." But neither of those is really s-f. "Trek" is essentially a serial, like "Bonanza," "Ally McBeal," or (the admittedly brilliant) "Law and Order": Each week the same cadre of characters encounters a problem, and each week resolves it, so that the next week they can resolve another one (as in, "Captain, it's an alien life form of pure energy, something we've never encountered before"; as in, "Oh, stuff it, Spock"). And "Zone," except for maybe ten or twelve episodes of real force, is a collection of anecdotes, all ending, as in the worst of Poe, in a punchline (They're really in hell, see? They were on Earth all along, see? The monster on the airplane wing was *real*, see? *Und so weiter*).

They're not s-f, in other words, they're "sci-fi," a term that makes *aficionados* and writers alike cringe: because "sci-fi" is the idiot twin of "s-f," concerned not with the chances for moral survival in an uncertain technological future, but with the glories of gadgetry and the funny little, mean little jokes our gadgets might choose to play upon us.

This is all by way of celebrating a TV series, new this year, that just might be the first honest, canny, and responsible meeting of TV and s-f at their mutual best. It's called "Welcome to Paradox," and it runs on—the irony has not escaped me—the Sci-Fi Channel.

Now since the Sci-Fi Channel geared up, maybe a decade ago, it's been mainly a sci-fi (not s-f) fan's dustbin: reruns of schlockmeister fifties films, godawful TV shows, and, more recently, original, made-for-TV movies and series, almost all of them powerful demonstrations of the major premise of Sturgeon's Law. In other words: dire.

What a surprise, then, to find, this season, "Welcome to Paradox" on the schedule. Produced by R. W. Vincent and conceived, and mainly written, by Jeremy



"Boy, talk about a stupid place to put a planet!"

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Lipp—of whom I haven't heard before—it's a show that almost justifies the whole damn channel, maybe the real entry of s-f at its best into the medium. The major networks could never make a profit out of a show this smart (remember the fate of "Nothing Sacred"?), but the coterie audience for a sci-fi may be just large enough to keep it afloat.

Here's the setup. In the future city of Betaville (a nod to Godard's classic s-f film "Alphaville"?) technology has triumphed, and triumphed altogether. What you want, that's what you get: clone yourself as a younger man and then transplant your brain back into the young you? Find a way to erase—until you want them back—all memories that torment you, all your sins and failures? Make a virtual-reality recording of the experience of your lover falling in love with you, and feed it to your head forever and forever after she leaves? That's Betaville.

The problem, of course, is what you do with yourself, what you do with your life, after you've achieved—or been given—that absolute control of your life: after you've become god. Welcome to paradox: welcome to paradise, or is it?

That's the very simple, and I believe, startlingly (for TV) grown-up thesis of this series. "Betaville" is not really a place at all, at least not like the too-too-solid bridge of the *Starship Enterprise* or the ooga-booga atmospherics of the Twilight Zone. Betaville is, in fact, the domain of s-f, its very self, where we explore the morality of our technology or, if you wish, the humanity of our "humanity."

H.G. Wells, the founder of the feast and one of my few idols, said early and often that the central problem of our century would be trying to keep our ethics apace with our technological advancement. It's a pronouncement that's become a well-worn coin among our politicians—the difference being that Wells took it seriously. Twenty years ago, when I was a fellow at the Wilson Center in Washington, D.C., a lecturer from one of the local think tanks explained it this way: We can do anything we want, in the sense that we can start making plans to accomplish the goal; but, time being time and money money, we can't do *everything* we want. Colonize Mars? You got it. Banish AIDS forever? No biggie. But not both, not at the same time. Virtual omnipotence, that is, entails nearly paralyzing moral ambiguity: welcome to paradox.

And that paradox—a damn sight more than the question of whether Luke Skywalker will kill Darth Vader—has dominated the best American s-f at least since August 6, 1945. As the host of "Paradox" (Michael Phillips) asks at the end of one episode: "Is technology a blessing or a curse—or can we now no longer know the difference?"

It's such a simple and such a crucial concept upon which to hang the series. And yet, remarkably, no TV show I know of (and I watch a lot of TV) has had the wit to do it before this one.

Mike Resnick, a wonderful s-f writer, argues that s-f is essentially a short-story medium, not a novelistic one. There are, he says, and he's right, maybe ten great s-f novels but surely hundreds of great s-f stories. The reason for this, I think, is that s-f is essentially parable rather than fully fledged narrative, descended from Aesop rather than Homer. Put it this way. Narrative gives us the thick psychic soup that lies behind and below all our crucial choices; but parable gives us the radish-crisp *moment* of those choices. Narrative, like the mystery novel, is ethical (*why* did he do it?) and parable, like s-f, is moral (what does it *mean* that he did it?): a reason, by the bye, for considering Kafka one of the premier s-f writers of the century.

Each episode of "Paradox" is based on a short story by one of the many—so many—brilliant s-f writers currently working in the field, and each, or each I've seen, is a perfect little articulation of the base-line dilemma we all face as we surf, or are swept, into the twenty-first century.

Check your local listings and visit Betaville. You'll see the first wedding of science fiction and the medium—TV—science fiction predicted. And, with luck, you'll find yourself conflicted. □

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Critics' choices for Christmas

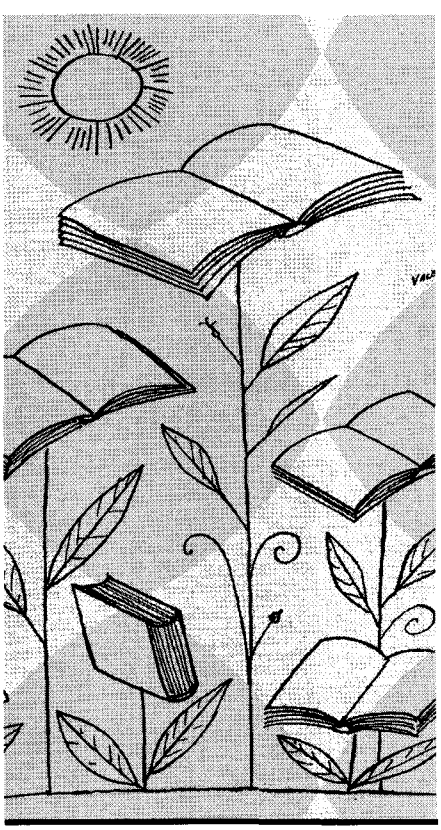
Jo McGowan

Jo McGowan, a frequent Commonweal *contributor, writes from Dehra Doon, India.*

Years ago, when I first moved to India, my parents gave me a subscription to the *New York Times Book Review*. Each issue took at least four months to arrive by sea mail, and often I would get six or seven weeks' worth in the space of three days. I could never resist reading them all in one go and then I would wander around in a daze, my mind a sea of titles either to be had at any price or avoided at all costs—I could seldom remember which. Not that it mattered—very few of them ever made it to the Dehra Doon shops.

Things have changed a lot in the past few years and many more American and European books are now available here, often at a fraction of their cost abroad. But with an exchange rate of forty-two rupees to the dollar, the cost is still prohibitive for most people. Since this is true for me, too, I depend less on reviews than on the recommendations of trusted friends. And I look for books I will want to read more than once: value for money is far more important now that the price of a book is 10 percent of my income.

By this measure, no author has ever delivered for me as Patrick O'Brian has. By now, his Aubrey-Maturin series (all published by Norton, $11.95) must be very well known, but the pleasure I have received from these eighteen volumes of historical fiction (early nineteenth-century British naval history at that!) is so enormous I cannot pass up the opportunity to convert more readers to the cult. I didn't expect to like these books, having no interest in war, sailing, or the British navy, but O'Brian's writing is so wonderful, his sense of humor so sharp, and his ability to draw characters so amazing that the details of the battles fought and the technicalities of sailing a ship in the 1800s float right by those readers not inclined to bother. It is the characters of Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin and their friendship, which grows and changes throughout the eighteen volumes, that really fascinates. I have read each one at least three times (value for money indeed!) and I am almost embarrassed by the depth of my passion for the series. I am presently on round four, volume seven. As usual, my speech has taken on a more stately tone, my admiration for valor and courage has increased, and my tolerance for mass mayhem in the service of His Royal Highness shocks even me. I look forward to reading O'Brian's most recent addition, *The Hundred Days* (Norton, $24, 280 pp.), when it appears in paperback.



On a lighter note: *Bridget Jones' Diary*, by Helen Fielding (Viking, $22.95, 291 pp.), chronicles a year in the life of a young single woman in London and chiefly concerns her relentless desire to find a boyfriend. It is a hilariously funny book which made me laugh so hard I felt sick to my stomach. I was reading it while riding around Delhi in auto rickshaws and twice the drivers pulled over, full of concern, thinking I was choking to death. Sometimes very funny books of this type get so carried away they become caricatures of themselves, but Fielding manages to maintain a genuinely human note. Her characters are warm and, in spite of their silliness, loving, witty, and intelligent.

The last book on my list is, according to amazon.com, not yet available in the United States, in spite of having been nominated for England's prestigious Booker prize. *The Everest Hotel* by I. Allen Sealy (who also wrote *The Trotter Nama*) is the story of a hotel-turned-convent in the foothills of the Indian Himalayas which serves as a home to a collection of unwanted people. Although the plot is occasionally contrived and a little farfetched, it is held together by writing of such beauty and arresting detail that I was able to ignore what might have been irritating devices in the hands of someone less skilled. Allen Sealy actually lives in Dehra Doon (his wife is in my parish!) and the story is set here (although he names the town Drummondganj). It is an amazing (and humbling) experience to see so many of the things I have tried unsuccessfully to describe to friends and family over the years rendered by Sealy so effortlessly and exquisitely. If you want to know what it's like to live in a small North Indian town, this is the book.

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Margaret O'Brien Steinfels

Margaret O'Brien Steinfels is the editor of Commonweal.

Recycling books as Christmas presents is a long-standing practice in our family: beloved children's books (yes, even to adults) are among them; but also the well-thumbed wonderfully illustrated Dickens; the out-of-print Grisham picked up for a song on the street; the self-improvement book that didn't work for you but might be just the ticket for someone else's neuroses, or aching feet.

Appearances to the contrary, book recycling is not a cop-out for the slothful. Picking just the right book for just the right person is time-consuming and sometimes even self-sacrificing. After all, they have been your books; you have read them; you have loved them first. Some books perhaps should not be sent too far so they can be recycled back—or borrowed.

Here are the books that I am considering for this year's Christmas recycle.

Not for the Jesse Helmses of this world, but for the foreign-policy fetishists on my list, there is Richard Holbrooke's *To End a War* (Random House, $27.95, 408 pp.). This absorbing account of the efforts to end the war in Bosnia opens with the 1995 accident on Mount Igman that took the lives of three U.S. diplomats whose deaths drove Holbrooke in his pursuit of peace. His bullying pursuit of even minor points got the Serbs, Muslims, and Croatians to Dayton, Ohio, and then his seemingly unlimited capacity to out-talk, out-drink, and out-sit all of them led to the Dayton Accords. Holbrooke's display of ego only goes to show peacemakers don't have to be nice guys. On the other hand, warmakers may be nice guys, as demonstrated by *A World Transformed* (Knopf, $30, 590 pp.), a collegial account of the Bush administration's foreign policy by George Bush and his national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft. Amazingly enough the chapters on the Gulf War sound much like the war the

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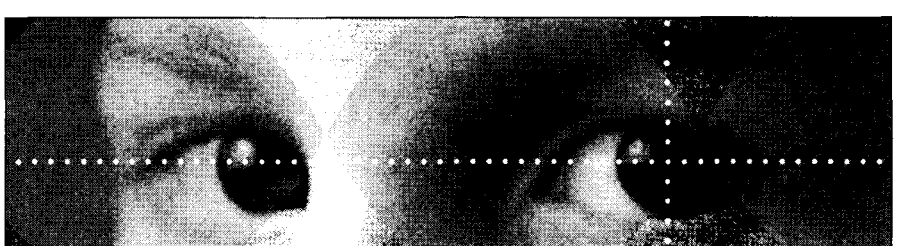

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media reported. And it probably is. This will be hard on the conspiracy theorists; still, it is good to be reminded of an administration that had a foreign policy.

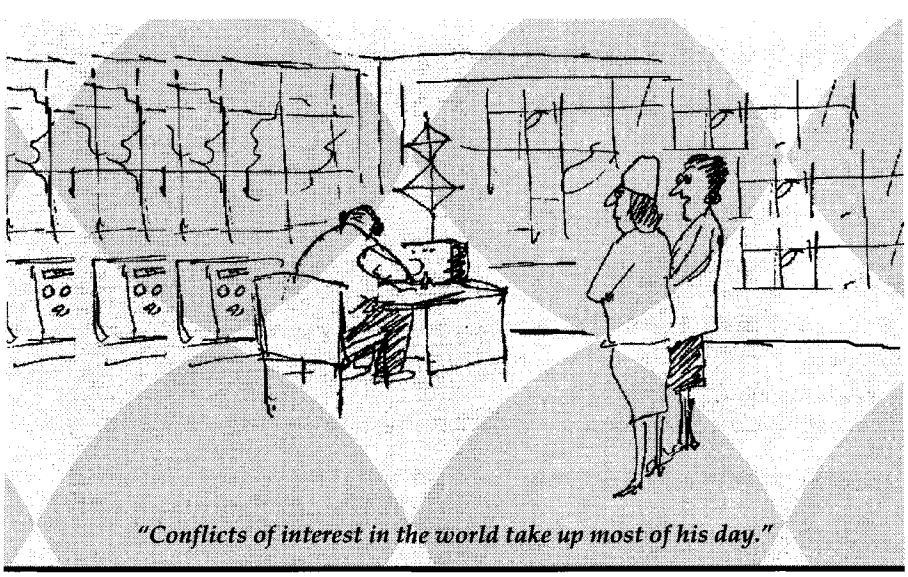
Continuing with boys' adventure stories: I will recycle the umpteenth copy of Stephen Ambrose's *Undaunted Courage* (Simon & Schuster/Touchstone, $17, 521 pp.), subtitled *Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West*. Ambrose draws on the journals of Lewis and his men, combining them with his own first-hand experience canoeing the Missouri River's tributaries and his exquisite storytelling. Both adults and child-readers (boys and girls) will devour this book. Or try reading it aloud to the whole family.

Not for the squeamish: The novelist Richard Price is rightly praised for capturing the lingo, the outlook, and the violence of inner-city kids caught up in the drug trade. In his recent *Freedomland* (Broadway Books, $25, 546 pp.), and the earlier *Clockers* (Avon, $6.99, 640 pp.), they necessarily spend a lot of time around cops. Cops and kids on the edge, unexpected violence, grim housing projects, desperate efforts to survive and escape, and yet these are stories of redemption and salvation. *Clockers* is the more moving and deft piece of writing, but both novels capture Price's hard-nosed but compassionate regard for the lowliest of the low.

And then for those who love the novel of manners (Jane Austen branch), there is Alice McDermott's evocative and poignant National Book Award Winner *Charming Billy* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, $22, 280 pp.). Working the same rich vein of Brooklyn Irish-Americans mined in her *At Weddings and Wakes*, she captures through the eyes of a grown daughter the complex relationship of two men come of age in World War II, bound up in friendship yet separated by a lie and Billy's drinking. A wonderful book. And then there are the seemngly aimless males at the center of Anne Tyler's *Patchwork Planet* (Knopf, $24, 288 pp.) and Carol Shields's *Larry's Party* (Penguin, $12.95, 339 pp.), each providing an interesting meditation on the life of a man with sterling character, genuine charm, and no ambition. Sounds like the women we all used to know!

And last on the list, a book I have already tried to recycle and had returned (for length): For all of those who have sworn off the Bloomsbury industry, Hermione Lee's *Virginia Woolf* (Knopf, $39.95, 893 pp.) is a brilliant book *of* biography and *about* biography. Lee's treatment cuts through all the theories and politics to return us a Virginia Woolf recognizably human. Woolf's struggles to live and to write within a culture of low-expectations for women and with a chronic mental illness help explain her perennial attraction even to those of us who only suffer from sloth.

To family and friends: This is only a list. Maybe I will keep these books and recycle others. But never fear, returns and exchanges are encouraged.



"Conflicts of interest in the world take up most of his day."

Mark Krupnick

Mark Krupnick teaches literature at the Divinity School at the University of Chicago.

Brian Morton's novel *Starting Out in the Evening* (Crown, $25, 325 pp.) is about a seventy-one-year-old writer who has seen better days. This book ought to be gloomy, but in fact it is tender and funny and exhilarating in its overall effect. I read it twice to try and see how Morton did it. Leonard Schiller, his hero, has seen his last two novels vanish into the oblivion of unread books; his emotional life has been mainly a wasteland since the death of his wife two decades ago; his body is failing; and, finally, his daughter, an unmarried, thirty-nine-year-old aerobics instructor, is more a worry to him than a consolation. Into Schiller's careworn life steps a twenty-five-year-old graduate student who loves Schiller's early novels and even persuades herself that she is in love with him. Not to worry. The old novelist is too scrupulous, and too realistic about his own physical powers, to let that go very far. But the young woman's interest and her vitality do give Schiller the sense, even if it's only an illusion, of a second chance. The writer gets less than he might have hoped for, but then who doesn't? And he is anything but a defeated man at the end. Morton's affirmations are quiet and modest but all the more attractive and persuasive for that reason.

Schiller belongs to the vanished world of the so-called "New York intellectuals." But he is a product of Brian Morton's imagination. Late last year an art journalist, Florence Rubenfeld, published a biography of an actual New York intellectual. Her book, *Clement Greenberg: A Life* (Scribner, $30, 336 pp.), is about the great art critic, perhaps the greatest in English since Roger Fry, who was the first to make the case for American abstract expressionism in the 1940s. Greenberg never was shy about his enthusiasms, and he might have said, as somebody does in an ad, "I'd rather

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fight than switch." The fact is, he got into a lot of fist-fights and made many enemies by saying what he thought and letting the chips fall where they might. In the end those enemies, mainly rival critics, got their revenge. Rubenfeld's informative book provides access to "the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart" from which arises glorious art and brilliant art criticism, too.

A different kind of art is on view in Dora Thornton's *The Scholar in His Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy* (Yale University Press, $50, 208 pp.). This book is an instance of a new kind of scholarship that focuses on "material culture" as a way of gaining insight into society and the history of taste. We learn here the rationale that motivated clerics and scholars and doctors of law and medicine in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Florence and Venice in designing and furnishing their studies. Inspired by classical models, patricians and the new urban elite were not content to replicate the monastic cell of old. Nor, fortunately, had the study yet turned into the impersonal, modern-day "office." It was still the outer expression, as Thornton says, of "an inner sanctuary in the soul." The illustrations, thirty-four in color and ninety-five black-and-white, are glorious.

Peter Berger, the renowned sociologist of religion, has written a modest book, *Redeeming Laughter: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (Walter de Gruyter & Co., $23.95, 215 pp.). Berger explores a number of different comic modes on his way to his real concern, the possibility of a theology of the comic. Berger is mainly concerned to propose Christian folly as the highest form of comedy, and his examples include Jesus' riding into Jerusalem on a donkey and his mock coronation by the Roman soldiers, Erasmus's praise of folly, and Kierkegaard's theory of irony. We perhaps unserious types who share Berger's attraction to comedy can only be encouraged by his seriousness about the pratfalls of the circus clown and the delight of infants in the game of peekaboo. He concludes with a modest profession of faith, the substance of which is "the intuition that comedy is more profound than tragedy." The larger point of this book is that comedy may be closer than tragedy to the spirit of religion.

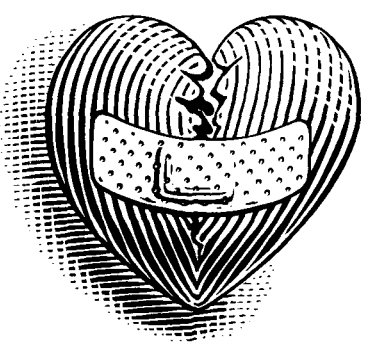
Berger writes about modernity and the pluralism of viewpoints in relation to the comic attitude. Isaiah Berlin, the great exponent of liberal pluralism in politics, died last year at the age of eighty-eight. Farrar, Straus and Giroux has published a generous anthology of Berlin's most influential essays on the history of ideas and related matters. These essays—on the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment, on nationalism, different conceptions of liberty, and many other topics—were written for the general reader. I haven't the space here to detail the infinite variety of Berlin's interests, but suffice it to say that this collection, *The Proper Study of Mankind* ($35, 667 pp.), is a repository of intelligence and wisdom such as to make it a stay in our own bad time. A book to which one will many times return.

Robert Imbelli

The Reverend Robert P. Imbelli is a priest of the Archdiocese of New York. He teaches theology at Boston College.

Preaching to his monks, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux urged them to consult the two books wherein God's Word is mediated to us: the book of Scripture and the book of experience. Each requires, of course, a deeply discerning and not merely surface exegesis. And though, for the believer, the book of Scripture bears a unique authority, that authority depends, to a considerable degree, upon its ability to illumine and nurture experience, both communal and personal. In light of this conviction I recommend three works that, in recent reading, exegeted for me the book of experience, and one that brought new understanding to the book of Scripture.

If you think you can't make it right, you're wrong.



Heal a broken relationship.

A message from the Catholic Church

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Two books by Jon Krakauer, *Into Thin Air* (Anchor, $7.99, 293 pp.) and *Into the Wild* (Anchor, $12.95, 207 pp.) have graced the best-seller lists for weeks. Each of them provides a harrowing sense of the heights and depths of human experience. The former recounts the Mount Everest expedition of May 1996 in which Krakauer participated, which ended in the tragic deaths of four members of his own party as well as others. The latter tells the story of twenty-four-year old Chris McCandless, who, after disappearing from home and family upon graduation with honors from Emory University, perished of starvation in the Alaskan wilderness. In both books Krakauer prefaces each chapter with suggestive quotes from literary and other studies that richly echo and magnify the themes he sounds.

Krakauer writes a vivid, yet spare, prose, with a directness and honesty that respects human beings in all their admixture of generosity and irresponsibility, hubris and heroism. His own commitment to mountaineering and adventure lends perspective and insight to his accounts: "Achieving the summit of a mountain was tangible, immutable, concrete...and climbing provided a sense of community as well." Moreover, amidst the skein of motives, aspirations, and ambitions, a further yearning may be discerned. "In subjecting ourselves to week after week of toil, tedium, and suffering, it struck me that most of us were probably seeking, above all, something like a state of grace."

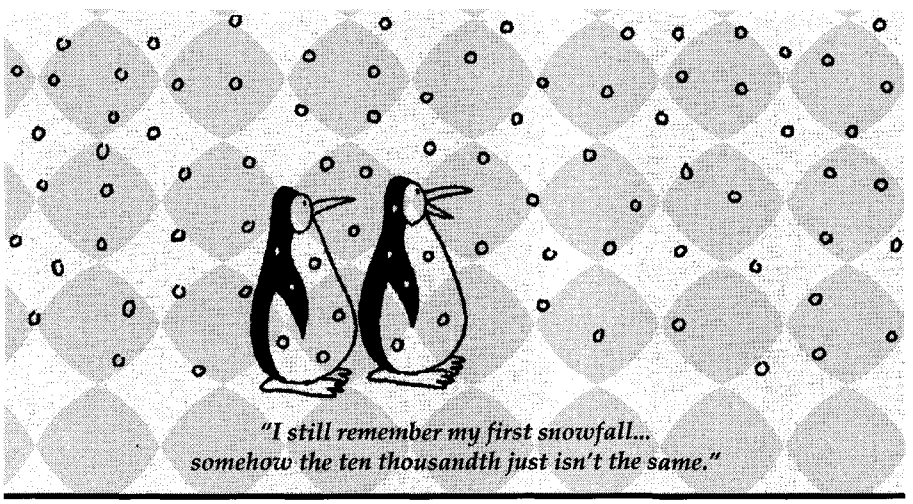
He brings compassion and sensitivity to his delicate telling of young Chris McCandless's tale. Reflecting on McCandless's short, perplexing life, Krakauer evokes the experiences of early Irish monks who, at the risk of their lives, sailed off to distant islands in a quest for solitude and salvation. "They were drawn across the storm-racked ocean, drawn west past the edge of the known world, by nothing more than a hunger of the spirit, a yearning of such queer intensity that it beggars the modern imagination."

Countering psychologically reductive readings of McCandless's life and charges of a suicidal pursuit of danger, Krakauer restores spiritual depth and dignity to the young man's quest (and offers a plausible reconstruction of the unwitting ingestion of poisonous seeds that ultimately provoked his death). One closes the book in awe at witnessing a terrible purification and (dare one say) redemption. The torn leaf of a book, found among the young man's effects, contained on one side the quotation of a poem that began, "Death's a fierce meadowlark." On the other side, McCandless had inscribed his own final words: "I have had a happy life and thank the Lord. Good-bye and may God bless all!"

To move from the deadly perils of Everest and the Alaskan wilderness to the domesticity of Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Wait Till Next Year* (Touchstone, $13, 261 pp.) may appear perverse. Yet what unites these varied probings of the book of experience is the intermingling of the extraordinary and the ordinary. Goodwin's book is more than a delightful and nostalgic memoir of a young girl's love affair with the Brooklyn Dodgers. It is an insightful and moving account of coming of age in the America of the oft-maligned 1950s — a time when face-to-face communities had not yet yielded to the anonymity of malls, much less the isolation of the internet. Her book pays tribute to loyalties, both large and small, and to a sport and a time that, however belatedly, began to redeem the promise of racial integration.

Goodwin recognizes that all passions are in some sense domestic, gravitating about home and hearth, and that the sufferings there generated can be either destructive or redemptive. Her book celebrates the history-making heroism of a Jackie Robinson, but, even more, the everyday heroism of the author's father who endured the loss of mother, father, and siblings, yet found the faith and courage to prevail and bestow life. As she initiates her own sons into the splendor and anguish of baseball, she is conscious of "the invisible bond among our three generations...linking my sons to the grandfather whose face they have never seen but whose person they have come to know through this most timeless of sports."

Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis's *Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word* (Ignatius, $29.95, 746 pp.) proposes a "cordial reading" of the first eleven chapters of the Gospel according to Saint Matthew: a *lectio divina* that does not disdain historical-critical analysis, but directs a more holistic exegesis of the book of Scripture, at whose heart stands the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. The author incorporates into his commentary liturgical prayer, artistic imagery, and silent pauses (visually represented by the Hebrew letter "Aleph"). He thus achieves what many claim, but few realize: a "second naiveté" in which Scripture appropriates us and our experience far more than we appropriate it. With Bernanos the author insists: "the Word of God does not 'frivolously wink at us; first it liberates and only then does it console.'" Liberating and consoling, Christ recapitulates every intimation of grace, gathering all the fragments into the Eucharistic feast.



"I still remember my first snowfall... somehow the ten thousandth just isn't the same."

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Marcia Colish

Marcia L. Colish is the Frederik B. Artz Professor of History at Oberlin College. Her most recent book is Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition: 400–1400 *(Yale University Press).*

Have you ever wondered how Thomas Aquinas has fared since Vatican II signaled the death of neo-Thomism of the strict observance? Well, a new generation of Aquinas scholars has emerged, no longer interested in promoting the legacy of Suárez or Cajetan or in defending Thomism as the perennial philosophy. Among the best of the new appraisals is Brian Davies's *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford, $24.95, 391 pp.). In addition to contextualizing Aquinas historically, Davies's lucid exposition reflects his appreciation of the fact that Thomas linked philosophy inextricably with theology. Davies also flags ideas and arguments of long-term interest, but without imposing an anachronistic philosophical template on the mind of the Angelic Doctor.

For an in-depth look at a key aspect of medieval religious sensibility, lavishly illustrated with visual as well as textual materials, turn to Caroline Walker Bynum's dazzling *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336* (Columbia, $40, 368 pp.). She shows that, however much theologians defined human nature as a soul using a body or treated the body as the soul's enemy, Christians in all cultural registers saw their personal identity as intimately connected with their bodies, in the next life as well as this. In practice, the biblical conviction that our bodies and souls are integrally united and that Christ took on both aspects of human nature so that both might be saved and glorified proved more powerful than Platonizing anthropologies and ascetic regimes. This is a fascinating and inspiring read from a scholar who has done more than anyone else in her generation to reconceptualize the ways we now think about the body as a historical subject and about medieval religious attitudes and practices.

Early modern Europe is also a field in which we are blessed with fine scholars skilled at making cutting-edge research available to nonspecialists. A topic that used to be marginal, but that is now front and center, is women's history. Merry Wiesner's *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, $15.95, 264 pp.) does an outstanding job of synthesizing recent discoveries. Considering women in the family, the workplace, the churches, the intellectual and artistic world, and their own estimates, as well as men's, of their roles, this book also includes women often ignored, such as Jewish and Eastern European women and those leading sexually transgressive lives, such as prostitutes, lesbians, and transvestites.

Should we think of Catholicism in early Modern Europe as "Catholic reform" or "Counter-reform"? R. Po-Chia Hsia briskly deep-sixes this *démodé* question in *The World of Catholic Renewal* (Cambridge, $16.95, 173 pp.), the most recent overview of this period of Catholicism. Neither defensive, hagiographical, nor triumphalist, he gives evenhanded attention to movements for reform arising before and apart from Protestantism and to those emerging in response to it. Hsia's coverage is broad, including religious orders old and new; lay piety; the run-up to the Council of Trent, its decrees, and their spotty implementation; foreign and intra-European missions; religious education; women in religion; the papacy and curia; and more. Oddly, he says little about theology as such. But his treatment of devotion and mysticism makes it abundantly clear that, if the orthodox consensus was now less accommodating than it had been earlier, more than one religious option remained possible in Catholicism, official propaganda notwithstanding.

Finally, since I read for pleasure as well as on the job, a comment on novels. My favorite, this year, is Robert Stone's *Damascus Gate* (Houghton Mifflin, $26, 500 pp.), a remarkable picture of the kaleidoscope of faiths, ideologies, and their bizarre conjunctions in today's

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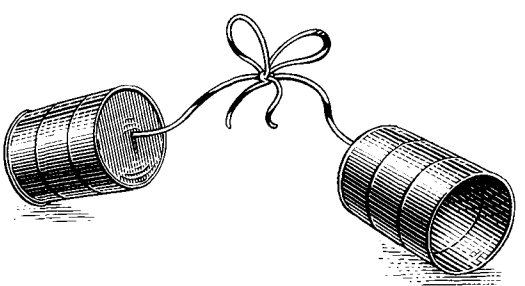

Reopen a line of communication.

A message from the Catholic Church

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Jerusalem. Stone brilliantly captures the way in which the Holy City acts as a magnet for both seekers and dogmatists of all kinds, their convictions and yearnings brought to fever pitch by its evocative and contested shrines, and its shimmering light, blinding as well as illuminating. He deftly limns his many characters, orchestrating the numerous subplots they inhabit while keeping the reader's eye focused on a central plot so fantastic, yet so plausible, that suspense runs high right up to the cliff-hanging finish.

Compelling, in quite another way, is the debut novel of Harriet Doerr, *Stones for Ibarra* (Penguin, $6.95, 214 pp.) If you missed it when it first came out, do read it. An American couple move to Mexico, the husband having inherited property there. They try to learn the ropes. The husband sickens and dies, and the widow must decide whether to stay or return to the States. This deceptively simple plot is the matrix around which Doerr constructs a tale about love, loss, and identity as rich in human understanding as it is awesome for the purity and economy of the author's style. A book to read, reread, and savor.

Barbara DeConcini

Barbara DeConcini is professor of religion and culture at Emory University and executive director of the American Academy of Religion, the chief learned society for professors of religious studies.

As I look back across the year, certain books have stayed with me. I have decided to make that my main criterion of selection. How quirky, how ephemeral a standard! But I would want to claim (with philosopher Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*), that we remember *the memorable*, those stories of events and actions that respond to the question of *who* rather than *what* we are. Memorable stories are ways of finding out about ourselves and our worlds. My favorite 1998 books have told me such stories.

Martin Gilbert's *Holocaust Journey* (Columbia University Press, $27, 480 pp.) serves less as an introduction to this evil event at the heart of our century and our Western world than as a powerful traveling companion, whether that travel is in fact, or imagination, or both. Britain's leading historian of World War II and the Holocaust was prompted to chart the journey by a student's simple question: "Why don't we go to see these places we've been studying?" Why indeed! The group's two-week trip is at once a lamentation for the dead and a celebration of the Jewish life that had invigorated prewar Europe. The book's subtitle, *Traveling in Search of the Past*, puts me in mind of Virgil's Aeneas, who launches his mission to found a great new civilization by traveling backwards and downwards into the underworld, there to seek the wisdom of the ancestors. Gilbert's chronicle of this trip into the heart of darkness and the unimaginable pain of the past becomes a moral imagining of a different future.

Two recent books important for American higher education make an analogous move, finding in the past resources for a fresh future. In *Cultivating Humanity* (Harvard University Press, $15.95, 328 pp.), Martha Nussbaum takes on and complicates the so-called culture wars in our colleges and universities by presenting a classical argument for curricular diversity. In *The Shape of the River* (Princeton University Press, $24.95, 472 pp.), William Bowen and Derek Bok mine the Mellon Foundation's rich database of records of some 80,000 students who matriculated at twenty-eight academically selective institutions. Through quantitative analyses, bolstered by surveys and personal reflections from those surveyed, the authors mount a detailed and powerful argument in favor of the effectiveness (for whites as well as blacks) of affirmative-action programs, concluding that "academically selective colleges and universities have been highly successful in using race-sensitive admissions policies to advance educational goals important to them and societal goals important to everyone."

I reread Patricia Hampl's *A Romantic Education* (Houghton Mifflin, $12.95, 344 pp.) this year because my own Holocaust journey would be my first visit to Central Europe. Hampl herself travels to her ancestral *Mitteleuropa* in imagination long before she confronts the possibility of actually going there. She worries that Prague's new accessibility will destroy its metaphorical power for her, a power deeply embedded in her Catholic, Upper-Midwestern, coming-of-age-in-the-sixties restiveness. Her account is less a memoir than a *bildungsroman*, wonderfully weaving her own story into the geopolitical Zeitgeist of our time. No undigested "true confessions" here—rather a piercing and distilled and witty reflection in the clean, direct, saturated language of the poet.

In contrast, Caroline Knapp's *Drinking: A Love Story* (Delta, $11.95, 286 pp.) has all the power of the raw. The reader is drawn so immediately into the compelling narrative drive of self-destruction that you might easily miss the work's subtle shape. This is a dark romance indeed, one that traces a bright young writer's slow, terrible descent into alcoholism and the long road back, starting "the night I nearly killed my

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oldest friend's two daughters." What reviewers referred to as "a remarkable exercise in self-discovery" is, to my mind, a powerful account of spiritual formation, a journey downward into the dark hole of the self, all the way to where that darkness opens onto light ("I have called you by your name, you are mine," Isaiah 43:1).

Two other books nurtured my spirit this past year. In *Practicing Our Faith* (Dorothy C. Bass, ed., Jossey-Bass, $14, 232 pp.), thirteen Christian writers address themselves to twelve key practices—"shared activities that address fundamental needs and that, woven together, form a way of life." Though only three of the contributors identify themselves as Catholics, the practices they address—from hospitality, honoring the body, and household economics to the discernment of spirits—embody in their simple and available everydayness a sacramental and incarnational way of life.

Not given to self-help books, I nonetheless have profited from Janet Luhrs's *The Simple Living Guide* (Broadway Books, $20, 444 pp.). This lovely tome is chock-full of helpful hints for simplifying your inner and outer life—a sort of Héloise for those who would like to consume less and celebrate more of creation. In my household, our breakfasts are tastier, more nutritious, and cheaper and our closets sparer. Here's one example I love: After going shopping, "I leave the tags and labels on for a week without touching the item. Usually after a week, my 'gotta-have-it' attitude has passed and I return the thing to the store."

Speaking of shopping, why not give gifts of the spirit this year? My final recommendations are two slim volumes of poetry, suitable for slipping into a stocking or under a tree. Both chart journeys inward and reveal the fruits of the examined life. In *Another Spring, Darkness* (Calyx, $12.95, 97 pp.), we are treated to the words and world of a young working-class Indian poet, Anuradha Mahapatra. American poet Carolyne Wright has translated and rendered these deeply poignant, richly sensual Bengali poems into a mesmerizingly redolent English. In *The Lives of the Heart* (Harper Perennial, $13, 108 pp.), Jane Hirschfield continues to offer passionately intelligent and deeply souled lyrics, here all about what one of Saul Bellow's characters calls "these spotty damn mangoes in our breasts, which give us away." The title poem alone is worth the price of admission! In "On the Beach," the speaker watches a child (perhaps her distant self?) select a few precious pebbles:

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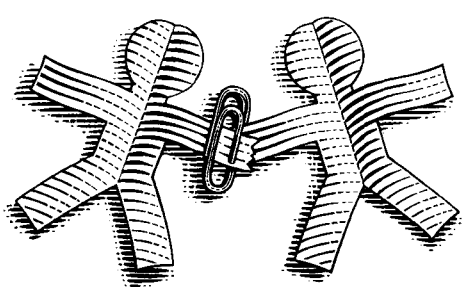

Reconnect with someone you love.

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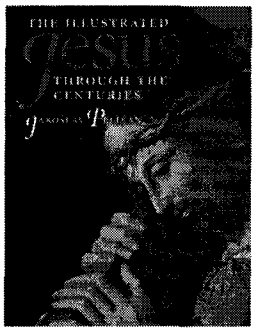

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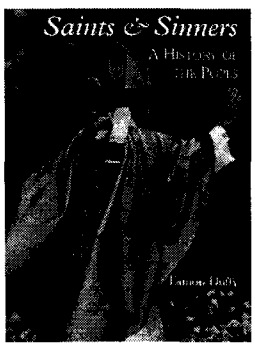

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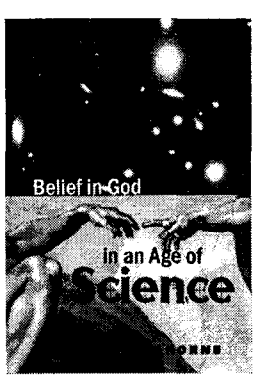

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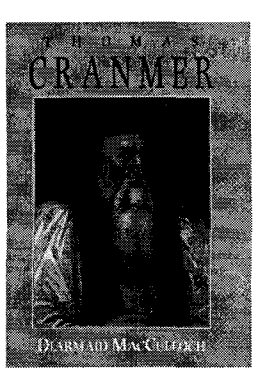

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I would speak to her if I could
but across the distance, what
would she hear?
Ocean and ocean. Cry of a fish.

Walk slowly now, small soul, by
the edge
of the water. Choose carefully
all you are going to lose, though
any of it would do.

How about ending your Christmas meal with this "Spell"?

Having eaten the pears.
Having eaten
the black figs, the white figs.
Eaten the apples.

Table be strewn.
Table be strewn with stems,
table with peelings of grapefruit
and pleasure.

Table be strewn with pleasure,
what was here to be done
having finished.

So here we are in Advent, watching and waiting, hoping against hope that pain and loss, while givens, are not the end of the story, that our little lives are 'rounded by gift and celebration. In his *Christmas Oratorio*, W.H.Auden calls

the Time Being. . . .the most
trying time of all

but redeemable by remembering the first Christmas, when

for once in our lives
Everything became a You and
nothing was an It.

These are the books I read this year that help me remember that. □

CORRESPONDENCE

(Continued from page 4)

scription. Since I had been raised as a typical ghetto Catholic, it was a revelation to me. I remember being struck especially by the work of Walter Kerr, drama critic at that time.

In those days, *Commonweal* would sometimes reprint items from *The Month*, so I subscribed to that review as well; in the fifties any given issue might contain an article by Frederick Copleston or Martin D'Arcy. It was

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exhilarating to enter such an intellectual arena. *Commonweal* would also refer to *Worship*, and once more I subscribed, thereby learning about the unknown world of liturgical renewal. In time, I encountered a group of Benedictines in Venezuela and found a community of sorts.

Now my son is in oil exploration in Bangkok, and he talks with exasperation about the church's teaching on birth control. (In Bangkok, human beings are packed together to maximum density.) So I am sending him a subscription to *Commonweal* to help him see the church in a different light. No easy answers, I know, but it will help.

EDWARD M. DAVIN
Falls Church, Va.

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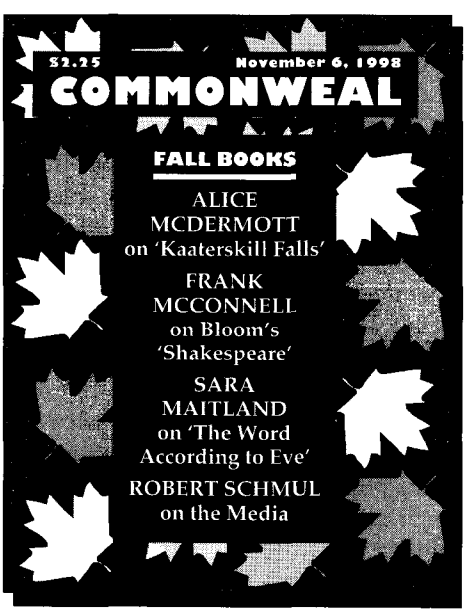

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THE DEFENSE RESTS

Jo McGowan

When I heard about the October 17 death of Jim McFadden, founder and publisher of the *Human Life Review (HRL)*, I felt strangely bereft.

My association with Jim began in 1989 when he reprinted an anti-abortion piece I had written for *Newsweek*. (His *Review* dealt solely with "life issues": these came to include topics like euthanasia, contraception, and *in vitro* fertilization, but abortion was far and away its overriding concern.) He sent me a copy of the issue in which my piece appeared and I read through it with a growing sense of dismay. I had never been published in so conservative a magazine. Indeed, as a good left-winger, I had barely even read one, except to poke fun at it. My first reaction was to hide the thing before my husband saw it.

Something kept drawing me back to it, however, until finally I gave up, sat down, and read it straight through. I was hooked.

What a strange experience. With the exception of the abortion issue, Jim and I probably disagreed on almost everything of any importance: from women priests to capital punishment, from defense spending to socialized medicine. Still, I thought of him as a dear friend and a profound influence on my life.

Jim was, probably first and foremost, a Catholic. He was a strong conservative, fiercely loyal to the pope, and utterly convinced of the prophetic power of the church. For thirty years he worked as a journalist with the *National Review*, whose political views were harmonious with his own, and for nearly twenty-five he presided over the publication of the *Human Life Review*, the only scholarly journal in the country devoted solely to exploring the "life issues," most notably abortion. In it, he gathered some of the world's finest argument on the subject, mainly against, but occasionally for as well, just to give his own stable of writers something fresh to wrestle with.

In addition, Jim put out the *catholic eye*, a quirky little biweekly newsletter that often gave an eye for an eye, written, it seemed, entirely by himself, in which he took on whatever secular god was in vogue at the moment. Sparing no one (except perhaps the pope and Mother Teresa), he would gallop along, shooting from the hip with sarcasm and truly awful puns, quoting from such diverse sources as the London *Economist* and the *Baltimore Catechism*. In the beginning, reading it used to literally give me a headache and I often flung it in the wastepaper basket in disgust, but just as often it made me laugh out loud.

Laughter was an important part of Jim's life. He loved finding the lighter side of almost everything and he made a point of lacing the very serious pages of the *HLR* with hilarious cartoons lifted from the *Spectator* of London. He was, as William Buckley pointed out, the "prime exhibit of G.K. Chesterton's dogged insistence that piety and laughter are inseparable, and indefeasibly the work of God." Jim was also a family man, delighting in his five children and two grandchildren and, most especially, in the love of his wife, Faith Abbott.

I think what I admired most about Jim was the strength of his beliefs. He was fearless in their defense, in spite of the ridicule he was certain to receive in an unbelieving society. This quality of his was an inspiration to me in my often lonely position as an anti-abortion left-winger. Given the intricacies of a situation in which most of the people I associate with are prochoice, the temptation is often to soft-pedal my prolife views, to be "sensitive and compassionate."

If nothing else, Jim made it impossible for me to use either of those words without quotation marks! In his own writing and in the things he published, he consistently exposed what passes for compassion (assisted suicide, for example) as the shallow selfishness it is. And he did it with a rigor that astonished: One is not accustomed, in these days when "nonjudgmental" is the highest compliment, to hearing unvarnished truth, thundering off the page with nothing less than biblical certainty.

But the really important thing about Jim McFadden, who cultivated the image of being "to the right of Atilla the Hun" (to quote his daughter, Maria), was that he was one of the sweetest men I have ever known. I was on the receiving end of his generosity for the nine years I knew him, and I am sure I was only one on a long list. Regularly he sent me large packages filled with magazines, clippings, and books—all to keep me informed and to encourage me to keep writing. How did he remember me—and how out of touch I might be feeling—in the midst of his extraordinarily busy life? On his first day back in the office after his cancer surgery, he sent me a note and "a few oddball items" he had been saving for me.

Our friendship was mostly through letters (we met only twice, both times for lunch in wonderful Italian restaurants in New York City), and these letters necessarily dwindled as his cancer progressed and I became more and more taken up by the care of my own seriously ill child. She was a special pet of his and he followed the joys and sorrows of her life with a constant concern, made sharper by his own suffering. I know he is watching her still, and I feel a little safer with this champion of human life now firmly ensconced in the only court that matters. □

Jo McGowan *and her family live in Dehra Doon, India. She is the founder of Karuna Vihar, a school for children with special needs.*

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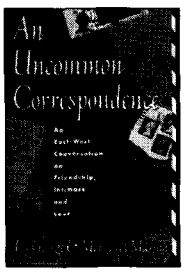

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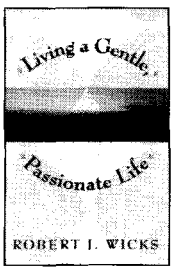

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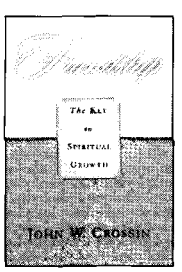

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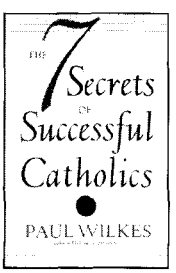

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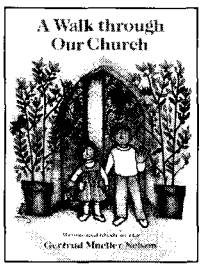

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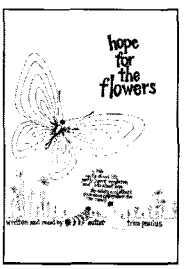

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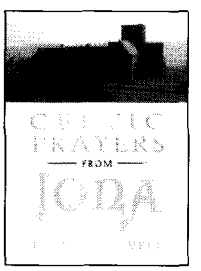

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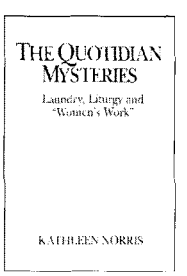

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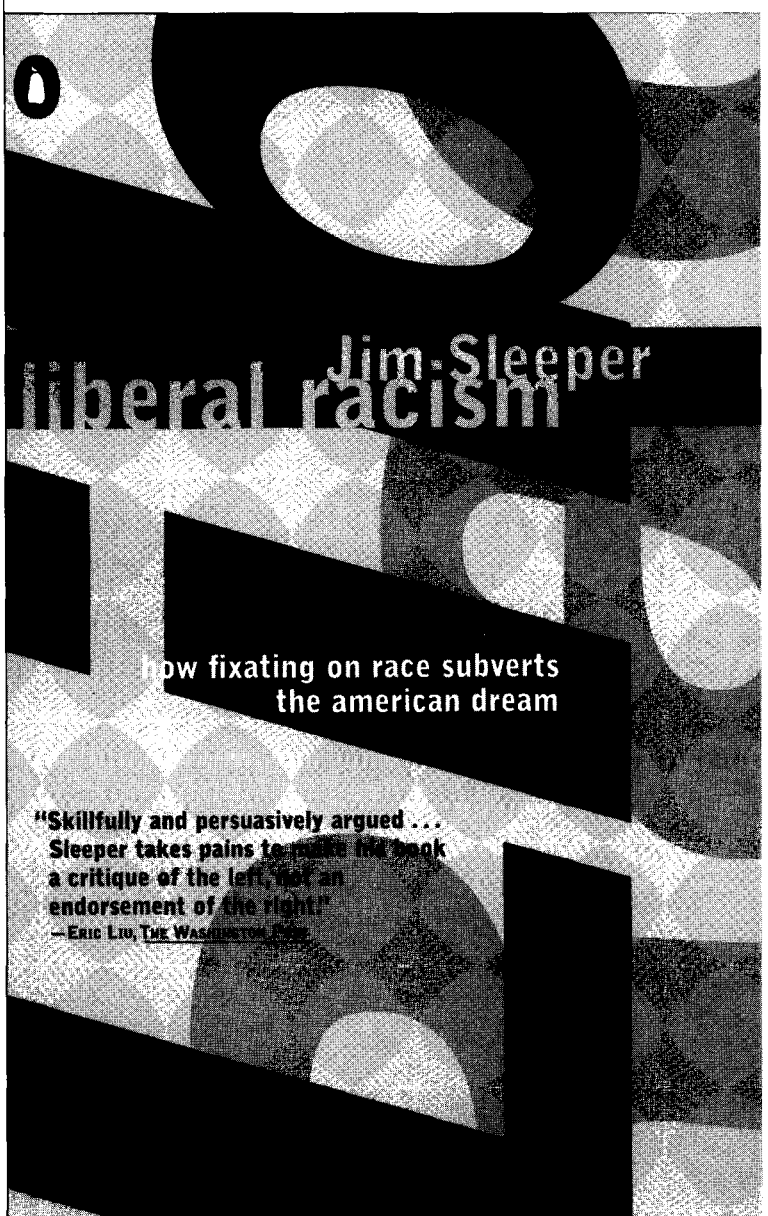
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